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Rachel Eisenstadt

1918 - 1990

Boris (Dov) Eisenstadt

1916 - 1985

Alex Burstein

1940 -

Betty Eisenstadt

1951 -

CHAPTER 1

In June of 1940 Lithuania was deceptively peaceful. It was a perfect Sunday morning in the resort of Panamune, 10-15 miles from the town of Kovno. Even as the early morning sun cast its first shadows on the balconies the sky was a brilliant blue. The fresh morning air was filled with the scent of trees. Panamune, was renowned for its large river Neman with its clear blue waters and the white sandy shores. In such a setting what was about to happen was unthinkable.

The day unfolded as it had on every other morning in this resort town. As if on cue, women appeared on their balconies, one by one, with their morning coffee. Most of them came from Kovno. They exchanged morning pleasantries, made plans for the day, invited neighbors over to visit and generally enjoyed one another's company. I was enjoying the outdoors with my son Alex listening sleepily to the radio.

The news that morning sent me abruptly into a cold sweat. Even now, thinking back to that day, that moment, I relive the feeling of foreboding. The Russians were advancing into Lithuania. Our days of freedom were over, perhaps forever. I scanned the other balconies aware at once that they had been suddenly emptied. In a single motion I grabbed my belongings and my son and ran home.

Not long after I arrived home a few neighbors came in to ask if we knew that the Russians were in town. We all decided to leave Panamune at once for we knew the Russians considered businessmen relaxing at resorts as bourgeois. We quickly gathered our belongings and ran to the bus depot to return to Kovno.

Once at home in Kovno I telephoned my husband Pina at his factory. I informed him that my son Alex and I, as well as all our neighbors, had returned home from Panamune. Upset by this news he left work at once. He was well aware that life under the Russians would be very hard at best. He explained how the Russian government would confiscate all private factories and nationalize them. There would be nothing left in the hands of individuals.

With all of this discussion of life under communism it suddenly occurred to me that it would be considered bourgeois for me to keep my maid Myrna. I informed Myrna that I would have to let

her go. She responded immediately with tears protesting that she did not want to leave us. Although I tried to explain that the Russians would not allow me to keep her she cried bitterly.

Alex kept his eyes glued on her and cried continuously. Myrna had looked after him since the day of his birth and understandably he thought that she was his aunt. I had reason to believe that she never felt like a hired hand. We had always treated her like a member of the family. I now gave her some gifts and paid her well. Tears in her eyes she kissed everyone good-bye and promised to look for us in better times.

Now Pina went to work each morning with little enthusiasm. He knew it was only a matter of time before he would lose his factory. He at least had the good fortune of having a staff that was very loyal to him. He had always treated them well - that close relationship would be to his advantage in the days ahead.

The Russians made their physical presence known in Kovno before very long. The most obvious sign was their confiscation of the most beautiful homes. The owners of the larger homes were forced to live in their basements while the officials lived in the main house. There were many large factories in Kovno and these were all, of course, taken over by the government.

It was a black time for all of Kovno. Dark clouds hovered over all of Lithuania. The wealthier class of Jews stood to lose the most from the Russian takeover. Yet despite all this adversity we were fortunate in some respects. At least the Russians did not harm anyone physically.

The wives of the high-ranking Russian officers immediately ran to the largest department stores to buy goods. They were good customers being in need of almost everything – from the barest necessities, like a spool of thread or needle, to finished garments. They had never seen such an abundance of consumer goods and Kovno soon become a paradise for them. They had entered a new world.

The Russian people had one unforgettable and endearing trait – the love they felt for all people, especially children. Because my husband was very well-liked by the workers, the Russians asked him to remain at the factory. This was the exception rather than the rule. Most former bosses had to go looking for work. Now that Pina had been demoted I feared that one day he would not be permitted to work there under any circumstances.

My friend Monia had parents whose factory had also been nationalized. She and I decided to find a way to appear like members of the proletariat. We decided to buy weaving machines for making stockings.

Once each of us bought a machine we purchased cotton, which was made available and carted according to a monthly quota. The amount of cotton was more than enough for two such inexperienced knitters.

We hired a girl to teach us how to weave stockings but we were all thumbs. Although we both tried very hard by the time the work reached our fingertips it was so badly tangled that it was impossible to untangle the cotton. Others could have made dozens of stockings out of the cotton we wasted. We always kept half a finished stocking hanging on the weaving machine, however, so people would believe that we were working.

I was most anxious to know what was happening in the large department stores on Laisves Blvd. At lunchtime, I took my little Alex with me and went shopping at the main stores. No sooner had I set foot into one store when a sales girl in a loud booming voice sarcastically said to me, “Haven’t you got enough goods already?” Badly embarrassed I took Alex and left the store immediately. I went to Monia’s house to tell her what had happened. I didn’t want the same thing to happen to her.

The Russians immediately nationalized our two-story brick home on Number Ten Namuna Street. They converted it into a factory that produced shirts and underwear. They allowed my family to live in one of the small houses in the courtyard because my husband had papers proving that he was working in a government factory. We had no choice but to get used to life under more trying circumstances than we had previously known.

For the time being, at least, we did not experience any anti-Semitism. High-ranking Russian officers lived in apartments on the second floor of our house and they soon sent for their wives and families.

We got along very well with them and they became very fond of my son. The abrupt change from working for oneself, to working for others required a large adjustment. My father’s perennial rationalization that “it could be worse” brought some consolation, however.

But before long the Russians began to deport the wealthier Jews and the Zionists to Siberia. They would come during the night with their lists of names and take people to the railroad depot for deportation. My parents tried to hide, but when they heard about my uncle and his family being deported they grew very fearful. The Russians were very well organized enlisting informers who did their jobs well.

A dark cloud hovered over our lives. No one knew whose turn would come tomorrow. Everyone hid or waited, wondering who would be next. The Russians tried to convince the Jews who were about to be deported that life in Siberia would be better for them than it would be for those left behind. We could not understand why the Russians were telling us these stories because we obviously did not believe anything they told us – good or bad. Families were being shattered.

Pain and heartache became commonplace among the Jews in our town as well as in other towns across Lithuania. Those left behind ran to the railroad station to look for their loved ones but they had already been sent away. Disappointed and with tears streaming down their cheeks they went home wondering what fate had in store for them. The Russians had also begun to arrest Lithuanian university professors who had spoken out against the communist regime.

A year passed. While life was very hard we were not punished as Jews and there was food for everyone. I could raise my child not in luxury or great comfort, but with the certainty that he would not be harmed and could live peacefully under the communists. The communist ideology was not acceptable to my husband, our parents, or me but we had to dance to the tune of the government if we wanted to live in safety.

Just as we were becoming acclimated to life under the Russians, another shock hit, again on a deceptively quiet morning in June. The radio issued the news that Russia was at war with Germany. We were also informed that the Germans were advancing on Kovno and that the Russians were running for their lives back to Russia. It was frightening to see the Russian soldiers in chaos not knowing which way to run. We were gripped by fear. I begged my husband not to go to work. I feared not only the Germans but the Lithuanians as well. We had already heard of the atrocities that the Germans had committed against our brothers and sisters in Poland. We Jews knew our fate full well.

We did not know where to go, which way to run or where to hide. Every door was locked before us.

Myrna, my friend and former maid, immediately came running to offer whatever help she could provide. With tears in my eyes I thanked her for coming and asked her if she could find a place to hide my son. We knew that we would soon be within the walls of a ghetto as we had already heard of the murderous plan to round up all the Jews in Europe. Myrna would not leave my house. She held Alex tightly and would not stop crying. She promised to find a place to hide my son apologizing for not being able to offer more assistance. When I suggested bribing the townspeople she responded that bribery was useless as each one was afraid that the other would betray him.

CHAPTER 2

The Germans arrived in Kovno in June, 1941. They immediately issued two orders to the Jews. The first order: By August 15, all Jews must enter the ghetto. They must wear two yellow Stars of David – one to be sewn on their right chest, the second, on their back. They must be easily identified from any direction. The second order: All Jews must walk only on the gravel in the middle of the road, never on the sidewalks.

As August 15 approached, we gave our more valuable possessions to Myrna. She was afraid to be found with too many goods, so we divided the balance between two men who had worked at our factory. They promised to help look for a safe place for my son. That proved to be an empty promise. The Jews, especially those with young children, are depressed and bewildered. Alex spends his days without a care in the world. Pina and I, on the other hand, are overcome with fears for his safety.

On August 15, Slobodka, which was renowned by Jews throughout the world for its yeshiva, became our new home. We moved into the home of one of my former employees. At least, there was room for my parents. My father immediately set about planning the construction of a bunker to hide Alex.

This was, in fact, his most urgent preoccupation. We were already painfully aware of the slaughter of innocent children elsewhere in Europe who were buried alive in mass graves. The question was where to build a bunker? Behind our house is out of the question. We are close to the ghetto police station, and the SS patrols continually circle the area. A likely place is at the home of a friend of Pina's, a few blocks away. He has a daughter the same age as Alex. But the very idea of a bunker does not seem safe. We continued to hope for a safe hiding place.

I contact prominent Lithuanians. I beg them for help – always unsuccessfully. This reluctance is understandable. Signs posted everywhere promise the death penalty for anyone caught hiding Jews.

Meanwhile, construction of the bunker continues in secrecy, at night. Heating, water, and ventilation are built in, to aid Alex's survival. After months of hard work, it is finally finished. We fill the bunker with food, prayer books, and prayer shawls.

A diphtheria epidemic then hit the small children, including Alex. I called Dr. Oleisky, the pediatrician, who immediately confirmed the diagnosis. My supply of vaccine is used up on other children. I told Dr. Oleisky that I would run to the chemist in town to get more.

Running to the barbed wire fence, I stop dead in my tracks. German guards are on both sides. I try to stay cool. I am really more concerned about Jewish police. I notice the German patrols talking to each other at one corner of the fence. Sneaking to the other corner, I am able to maneuver through to the other side. I run into the yard of a lumber mill on the free side of the fence.

Now I make my way down a long street, to the bridge into town. I don't even think about what would befall me if I were caught without my yellow Star of David. A German patrol is at one end of the bridge. I pass, undaunted, as if I had every right to be there. There is a second German patrol on the other side. I continue my charade, looking straight ahead and passing over the bridge unmolested. I break out into a cold sweat.

Now it occurs to me that I have six long blocks to the chemist. I am frightened by having to pass my former neighbors. I walk as fast as I can. As I approach, my fear of being recognized grows even stronger. I turn down Great Wilner Street, past the large tree, which marks the entrance to Small Wilner Street – where I grew up. On that street is the chemist.

I see many people through the window. So I go in through the back door to avoid being seen. I quietly knock on the door. The chemist's wife, opening the door, is very surprised to see me. She invites me in and offers me a snack. I explain that I am in a hurry because the doctor is waiting for the vaccine. She immediately asks her husband for some vaccine.

She then goes into the kitchen and gets butter and candy for Alex. She is concerned. She wants to know where I am working so she can bring some food for us. I give her the address of my workplace. I thank her. Her husband glances at me slyly, handing me a note offering to bring anything I need to my workplace. He also gives me additional medicines we might need.

Hopeful that I can get back to the ghetto with equal success, I start the long road back. I must hurry back. I am terribly frightened. Reaching the big tree on Great Wilner, I spot a former neighbor. She takes one of my packages and offers to help me across the bridge – the most

difficult and dangerous part of the journey. I tell her she is risking her life but she is determined to do what she can.

Walking quickly, we reach the bridge in a few minutes. Jewish work forces are being led across it to their work sites. It is a long way to the ghetto entrance. We are soon over the bridge and next to the gentile cemetery.

The cemetery entrance had been prepared previously to aid in smuggling children, ammunition, or whatever. Luck is still with me. The: guards are still at one corner of the fence and I sneak into a neighbor's house for a drink of water.

Running home as fast as I can I look up at the sky searching for my fairy Godmother – how else could I have gotten back safely? My need to save my child gave me strength I did not know I had. During the whole episode, lasting two hours, the doctor had seen Alex twice. The instruments sterilized, Dr. Oleisky now injects the vaccine into Alex. His life has been saved.

I thank her with all my heart, giving her the extra medicine for the hospital. I share the butter the chemist gave me with the doctor, saving some for the old folks' home. The chocolate I save for Alex.

Alex improves with each passing day. He is soon asking to go out to play. The damp and cold air makes me reluctant to let him go outside. The ghetto is filled with the mood of depression. Everyone is frightened and confused. Black clouds of gloom and doom envelop the ghetto during October.

Suddenly large signs appear, announcing that all Jews are to assemble in the main courtyard with their children on October 28, 1941. We decide to hide Alex in the bunker with our friend's daughter and his aged mother-in-law. We prayed that the Nazis wouldn't find it.

My parents are still young people. My sister is only fourteen years old. We feel certain that they are young enough not to be separated from us. We are also sure that young people will not be killed. After all, the Germans need young bodies to work for them.

October 28. 1941 proved to be a black day, thanks to the order of Commander Rauca. We hid our precious cargo in the bunker. I went with my husband Pina, my parents and my young sister to the courtyard.

The Lithuanians in military uniforms stood together with the SS, under Commander Rauca. In 1941, the Lithuanian fascists returned on the heels of the German Nazis, after fleeing from the Russians in 1940. Now they collaborated with the murderous Rauca to help select who would live and who would die. The black, evil, piercing eyes of Rauca haunted me for many years.

All at once, my parents and my sister are torn from my arms and sent to the left. As we get closer to Rauca our hearts stop and we are frozen to the spot. Without warning. Pina and I are sent to the right side, where all the young people are standing. They rip the beards off the men. My father and the rabbi of the town are buried alive in a common grave. A Lithuanian army officer who happened to be passing by ordered them dug up at once.

This proved to be a short reprieve. Those selected to go to the left are led away to a small Ghetto the next day. We know their fate. Falling on deaf ears, our cries and screams are enough to split the skies. But we know that nothing can help. Like stone statues, we stand and watch while our loved ones, our own flesh and blood, are led out of the ghetto to their deaths.

Even now I blame myself for not hiding my parents and sister in the bunker. Those sent to the right are sent back to their houses. Each family has lost someone. The Jews of the Kovno ghetto feel bitter, desperate, and alone in their torment. And the world does not – or cannot – help them.

At nightfall Pina goes to the bunker. The moment Alex is home, he asks for his grandparents and aunt. There is no alternative but to tell him the truth. All parents had explained to their children what their fate was in the ghetto. The children wanted to know why the place was called the “ghetto”. Their curiosity always led them to know more than was good for them. Despite our staunch efforts to hide our fears they could see through our facades. They could see the conditions under which we all lived, the cramped quarters, the universal and inescapable misery.

Pina was taken to work in the workhouse in the ghetto where various factories were located under one roof. I was put in a brigade and driven to the town of Ballel, 150 kilometers from the ghetto. Ballel was a little farming village near Vilkamir. The brigade consists of ten women and

ten men. Our job is to bring logs back to Chansz. There, we feed the logs into machines that cut them into small pieces used by the Germans to fuel the heaters in their trucks.

In Ballel we have the opportunity to trade clothing, wristwatches and specialty wall clocks that we get from fellow Jews in the ghetto for butter, cheese, chickens and other foods. Wall clocks prove to be the most prized items for trade. We have quilts as well, but the farmers want only those that are filled with down rather than feathers.

We trade whatever we have to trade in order to get food not only for friends and loved ones but also for the hospital, orphanage and old folks' home. Food was the one thing everyone needed.

Leaving the ghetto for Ballel is not easy. We have to hide the goods we plan to trade. We bribe the Germans to bring their military trucks in the middle of the night so we can hide our goods in the trucks. We also bribe the guards at the ghetto gate as well as the Jewish police. At first the road to Ballel is not patrolled but later the Germans do begin to patrol the road back to the ghetto.

Arriving in Ballel at around 10:00 a.m. we were allowed just a few minutes to rest and eat before going to work. The men loaded the logs on the big trucks. The women did not have as much work as the men so they had an opportunity to exchange their goods for food. The village had a number of Lithuanian farmers and we all spoke Lithuanian well. Surprisingly, there were no police in the town and we were free to go where we wanted. The further we went from town the wealthier the farmers were and the better the food we received.

These trips into the country became a regular practice. My friend Monia worked in the same brigade. She had a child Alex's age. Her husband had already been killed. Going together on one of these trading forays, we discussed the safety of our children and decided that we should find hiding places for them out in the countryside.

On one trip I met a good-natured Lithuanian farmwoman. Without hesitation, she offered me something to eat. As we talked I casually presented the possibility of hiding our children during the war. I spoke right to her heart, mother to mother, begging her to save these two innocent children. She herself had three children – each with big, beautiful black eyes and black hair.

I mentioned that our children don't look especially Jewish – Alex with his red hair and blue eyes, and Monia's daughter with blonde hair and blue eyes. After listening patiently she promised to discuss the matter with her husband. The hope that she would agree breathed life into me. I relished that feeling of hope as long as I could.

Monia and I then got right down to the business of trading goods for food. Monia went off to trade with another farmer. I had brought beautiful, colorful head kerchiefs with big red flowers. These I had bought in the ghetto with a hen and a few kilos of butter. The farmwoman was very taken with them and gave me several white cheeses, some butter, some geese, and other assorted foodstuffs.

Noticing that her husband was not about I asked where he was. Her response made me apprehensive: He was drinking whiskey at the neighbor's next door. I found myself saying, "Does your husband like to drink?" She responded calmly and without hesitation, "My husband was BORN in a distillery." My apprehension turned to cold fear. How could I entrust Alex to these people? I set that idea aside with mixed feelings.

By this time I had traded almost everything I had except a few wall clocks. She fed me a meal of cooked potatoes with sour milk, some black bread and butter. I thanked her kindly for the food and gave her a few handkerchiefs as a token of thanks for her kindness.

Monia came back to where I was visiting having concluded her business. I said to her in Yiddish, "This woman's husband is a drunkard. It's too dangerous to entrust our children to such a couple." The farmwoman showed her kindness to Monia also treating her to a meal.

The husband suddenly burst into the house, tall and dark and dressed in filthy, tattered clothes. He was reeling so from his drunken stupor that he could barely stand. His wife's introduction to us softened him and his innate kindness seemed to show. Still, our hearts were set against leaving our children with a man whose tongue was a slave to whiskey.

Spotting the wall clocks he instantly was shocked into sobriety. Eyeing them with obvious relish he asked me what I wanted for them. This man was not a rich farmer, having only a small farmhouse with a straw roof and a few skinny hens running about the yard. He didn't even have a tractor! Yet he desired those clocks so much that he offered a slaughtered cow from his house

in exchange. His offer delighted me and I accepted gratefully. Even this turn of events, however, did not budge me from my decision not to leave Alex there.

As the farmer carried half the cow carcass into the house, Monia and I contemplated it, feeling fortunate for all the mouths in the ghetto it would feed. We each took a slab. In addition to these generous portions of beef the couple gave us a supply of homemade smoked salami and cheese perogies.

I saw his compassion when he stated that he knew what the Germans were doing to the Jews and offered to take our families the moment things started to get worse for us. Tearfully we thanked him but privately we both voiced the Jewish saying: “What is in a sober man’s mind is on a drunk man’s tongue.” His sincerity was obvious as he plied us with food to sustain us on our journey.

It took an hour to drag the frozen carcass to our work site. The men took the meat from us and hit it under the logs. Without even stopping to rest we returned to the farm for the rest of the carcass. We felt good for the moment over our good fortune. Yet even this satisfaction was marred by the nagging unfinished business of finding a safe hiding place for our children. Upon our return with the second load of meat along with some other food we agreed that if things became very bad in the ghetto, we would simply run away.

We arrived with the food, which the men promptly hid under the logs. We told them to take some themselves to eat, and they took it to the barn. We rested until midnight, as we were afraid to drive through Vilkamir during the day. That was when the military police stopped and searched trucks.

On the ride back we asked one another what we got for our goods. One lady got a rabbit – she was holding and playing with it as if it were a child. We passed Vilkamir without incident. A great collective sigh of relief arose from the truck as a heavy load lifted from our shoulders. After riding some distance, everyone began to notice a terrible odor all at once. One man shouted that it smelled like a dead cow. The smell seemed to come from the truck but nobody knew what it was. Our happiness over our good transactions with the farmers distracted us from the odor.

Our approach to the ghetto, however, made that good feeling short-lived. We now became preoccupied with the possibility that the SS leaders would be at the ghetto gates. We knew the guards had been bribed by our leaders, but still ...

I could see Pina and my brother Hershel in the distance. Good! We were safe. The driver halted the truck at the gate and urged us to get our food out quickly. As the men moved the logs everyone grabbed their goods and ran home. I pointed out the hiding place of the cow under the logs to Hershel. He moved the logs, dug out the carcass, giving half to Pina and keeping the remainder. We stopped at Hershel's house since it was near the gate; even Monia came in. When the men placed the meat on the table Hershel repeated the shout of the man on the truck: "It smells like a dead cow in here!" Emphasizing repeatedly that it was inedible he explained that it was probably a sick animal and urged us to bury it.

Only now did the realization that we had made a poor trade hit us. As if to drive a spike through our hearts, Hershel snorted that the farmer was just waiting for the foolish Jews to come with their goods, so that he could pawn a sick cow off on them and take their last few possessions. With that, Monia and I began to cry. I responded, "If the farmer had beaten us we would not have hurt as much; it was so difficult for us to bring the cow to the truck."

I tried to forget the business with the cow. The task at hand was to dispose of it. Pina, a quiet man, tried to calm me by telling me that the next trip to Ballel would give me the opportunity to bring back some good food. He showed me the wall clock and the few pillows he had already bought for bartering with the farmers. That succeeded in distracting me from our recent misadventure.

If I learned what the farmers liked I also learned what they didn't like. They wouldn't take my sister-in-law's clothes, which she had given to trade. She was so short and thin and they were heavy people. They actually thought her clothes were for children. After that I concentrated on getting big things to trade.

Of all the work brigades the Ballel brigade provided the best opportunity for trading. Yet it had the greatest obstacles as far as getting the food back to the ghetto was concerned. We had to bribe the Jewish leaders with food to get through the gates. Each brigade member was assigned

the task of bringing food to one leader – we were called his or her angels. I was the angel of Dr. Natkin, a Jew from Berlin.

Hershel smuggled in large quantities of food. The ghetto committee knew he was as good as his word when he said he would bring food. They knew where to find it, and quickly distributed it where it was most needed. Hershel and I had the chutzpah of young people risking our lives many times to bring food in.

One day, terror made a sudden visit upon us. Rumors were circulating that the ghetto was being surrounded for a roundup of children. This was different from the everyday terrors. SS guards used to stroll about shooting crows to scare the children and their mothers. Our everyday existence in the ghetto was reminder enough of our mortality; these rumors amplified that reminder sharply.

Circumstances for the children worsened day by day. Parents never knew what to expect as the rumor continued to plague us. On the next departure day for Ballel the thought of leaving our children behind for two days in a row took on added apprehension.

We felt even more helpless if that was possible. I left Alex with my sister-in-law as Hershel also had to leave with his work brigade and Pina worked in the workhouse until 4:00 in the afternoon. Monia and I agreed with renewed resolve to look for a safe place again when we reached Ballel.

She and I did not feel free to discuss this matter in front of the other brigade members. Most of the men were single and hence did not share our particular fears about our children. Their main worry was getting food into the ghetto. Our brigade actually was successful in feeding hundreds of children and adults. The soldiers and drivers being well bribed didn't interfere with the women when they went to trade with the farmers. Despite this we remained fearful as we took goods out and brought food back in.

Monia and I were obsessed with our mission of saving our children. Yet it was a situation in which we could not win even if we succeeded. Once we did find hiding places there was the heart-wrenching prospect of separation from our little loved ones. It was all the more difficult because we did not want to take that fateful step as long as it was reasonably quiet in the ghetto.

I couldn't imagine Pina saying good-bye to Alex. When Pina put on his tfilin in the morning to pray he would pick Alex up and instruct him to kiss both the one on his head and the one on his arm. He was devoted heart and soul to his son. He prayed that nothing should ever mar the joy Alex gave him. He would console me by saying the Russians would free Kovno soon. But I knew that was wishful thinking and we could not afford to live in a dream world. The reality would not let us sleep.

CHAPTER 3

The next year passed by fairly quietly in the ghetto. Surprisingly our children were not taken from us. We did our trading as quickly as possible and continued our search for places to hide our children.

One day, at a clean farmhouse, the farmer wanted money in exchange for a hiding place. I agreed to this telling him that I would bring Alex only when it became unsafe for him at home. I was still postponing the inevitable. The good-natured lady of the farm was a mother of three children, aged one to four, with light eyes and complexions. This seemed a good place for Alex. The farmer shook my hand promising to honor his word. In a manner to which I had become accustomed by now he gave me food and drink.

Now we sought a safe place for Monia's daughter. The farm lady pointed out several farms in the area indicating that they were safe. She made me promise not to tell Monia that she would hide Alex. Laden down with hens, geese, cheese, butter and bread, it was difficult to carry on our search. To make matters worse, the mud was more like quicksand at times, impeding the movement of our feet. We decided to leave our heavy foodstuffs behind at this farmhouse and come back for them later.

With no time for self-pity we went to the farmhouses that were pointed out to me. In the growing darkness, we continued to search for one of the farmhouses she had suggested with a straw roof and a weather vane. We suddenly spotted it not too far away.

Exhausted and caked with mud we arrived at the house. Although the farmer was not at home his wife was there. The house was spotless and she amiably invited us to sit down. This was a signal for us to remove our muddy shoes. It was obvious that she had been expecting us as she promptly offered us food and drink. She set the table with butter, cream, hard-boiled eggs and homemade black bread.

We thanked her for her hospitality but promptly informed her that we wished to talk to her husband. When she responded that her husband was drinking at a neighbor's house shivers shot up my spine. Monia and I were speechless. I asked if the lady living across the road was named Anastasia. Answering affirmatively, she added that Anastasia was her sister-in-law, a woman

with a heart of gold. Her husband didn't drink and they seemed to have a good life. Without telling her the purpose of our visit, we thanked her for her hospitality leaving to cross over to Anastasia's house.

There we were greeted by a spotless, warm and homey residence and by a genuinely warm welcome from Anastasia. We started out with the usual trading for food. With darkness settling soon after our arrival she invited us to spend the night. We had to decline, as we were to leave with our work brigade at midnight. We did not even have time to ask if she would hide Monia's daughter, we had to put that off until the next visit.

Monia had gotten a sack of flour in which to hide all the extra foodstuffs we were carrying. As we started on the long road back to Ballel I reassured her that the next time we would try to find a place to hide her daughter. She was crying – depressed over not accomplishing what she had set out to do. I tried to comfort her. She seemed to hang on my words as I suggested to her that she forget about yesterdays and focus on tomorrows.

Everyone else was in good spirits as the trucks departed at midnight. This signified that everyone had eaten his or her fill. We were all singing happily until we reached a spot where two SS guards stopped the truck. We could hear them asking one of the drivers if there was anything on the truck beside wood. The bribed driver answered promptly that there was nothing on the truck beside logs. That seemed to satisfy the guards who waved us on – to our great relief.

I began to think about how many people were depending on the food we were bringing in. Precisely at daybreak we came up to the ghetto gate. We quickly unloaded the trucks and handed the food to families who came to help bring the food into the ghetto. Everyone worked quickly, with no wasted motion, leaving no sign of anyone ever being there.

The next day meant another trip to Ballel. We were astonished to learn that we had unloaded our truck yesterday minutes before Gecke, the SS commander, had arrived at the ghetto. Gecke, wearing the skull of death on his hat was a notorious murderer. We had cheated death by five minutes. It was clear that our task would become much more difficult. The day would come when our drivers would not be able to permit us to go trading. The drivers learned that Gecke would come to the ghetto gates each day to inspect our brigade. This time we traded for just enough food for us to eat in Ballel and on the way home.

As we approached the ghetto gates we could see the murderous Gecke, with his skull-bearing hat. Gecke ordered us to leave the truck and unload the logs at the gates while we submitted to body searches by the SS. Finding nothing he flew into a rage as he stomped away.

Despite the search I managed to smuggle two rings of salami under the fur collar of my coat. Talk about chutzpah. I was pleased that I had something at least to give my family.

Once again, we set out the following morning for Ballel, our bodies still weary from the last trip. Monia and I were firmly resolved to make arrangements for her daughter this time. Once more, rumors were circulating about the Nazis getting ready to round up children for the gas chambers. Arriving in Ballel we immediately set out on our objective. Needing to be reassured I stopped at the home of the farmer who promised to hide Alex. I was reassured but broken-hearted at the same time.

We came to a poor little farmhouse with a family with two children. Displaying hospitality they invited us to their table for some fresh milk and black bread. At the table I casually asked if they might consider hiding a blonde, blue-eyed little girl for a short while. They seemed agreeable but asked if the child could speak Lithuanian. I answered that she could not, but reassured her that children learn quickly. When I explained the reason for wanting to hide the child they were compassionate and quickly agreed to take her.

Our feeling of joy was short-lived; we thought only of the sadness of leaving our children. I am impressed that the farmwoman did not demand gold, I would have been suspicious if she had. The kind of person who wants gold is also the kind who hands your children over to the Gestapo. I told the couple that we would bring our children on Thursday and they were agreeable. After finishing our trading we started back to Ballel.

Although we were happy about settling the matter we were still beset by doubts about the children's safety. I told Monia that at least we would not have to witness our children's deaths. The memory of that roundup in the town square loomed up in my mind. Crying at our task we knew that we still must face reality. I told myself that we must remain alert to everything, that was the only way to survive.

We reached our brigade with our small packages in our hands. Our tear-stained faces and swollen eyes invited numerous inquiries. I lied that I had a headache and was worried about

being searched at the gate. Monia and I looked at each other in silence as we quickly passed the Vilkamir checkpoint without being stopped. The trip seemed to last forever for I was tired and worn out. I decided to feign sleep rather than stay up and joke with everyone but I could hear what they said.

As we neared the ghetto gates everyone strained to see who was there. Only Yankl Werbowksi, head of the employment office was there along with some German guards. Happily we jumped off and retrieved our food packs from their hiding places handing them to our families. Pina asked me if Alex's new hiding place was still assured and if we had found a place for Monia's daughter. I found it difficult to answer. I assured him that we had found places for both children close to each other.

It was very difficult for me to relate all we had gone through to find these places for it meant reliving all the great difficulties we had experienced. Pina's face told me he was suffering with me, his lips trembling as he asked me those interminable questions. As his voice grew softer and softer I knew what he was feeling and I couldn't find the words to comfort him. I am steeped in my own exhaustion and I only hope that I will not have to go to Ballel tomorrow.

Half the night has passed with no time for sleep. While packing Alex's things I could see the tears trickle down Pina's face. I tried to reassure him saying that we at least will not witness our children's murders. We could only pray to God. I said that we would one day be reunited as a family. I could only hope that one of us would remain alive to reclaim Alex from the village.

As I was packing things for Alex and for the farm lady, Pina entered the room carrying a small pair of leather shoes. He had painstakingly sewn these together from the remains of old shoes he had taken apart. Handing them to Alex he said to him, "This is from your father, the shoemaker." Then turning to me he intoned, "They are strong shoes, made from strong leather and strong thread and they will stand up a long time until we can bring our son back from the farmer and we can again be a family." Pina had great hopes but my premonitions told me otherwise.

At daybreak I must wake my dear precious child who sleeps so peacefully that it breaks my heart to wake him. But my work brigade is waiting for me. Alex opened his baby blue eyes innocently asking, "Mama, do you want to take me out of the ghetto because you want to hide me so that the

Germans won't kill me?" His eyes remained glued to Pina and me. I kept reassuring Alex that the war would not last long and we would be together again. Pina and I cautioned Alex not to speak to anyone, Jew or gentile.

Listening carefully he asked whether his father was coming on the truck with us. When I explained why his father couldn't come with us he started to cry, "Papa will be very sad without me and will miss me." It was enough to break any person's heart not just a parent's. Before leaving I asked Alex to kiss the Mezuzah on the wall for luck. Alex seemed to understand the situation. Holding tightly to his father he kept on kissing him as if this were the last time he would ever see him. Although he was only four years old he saw our suffering and I knew he felt our pain. His father quickly kissed Alex good-bye and ran off to work.

The workers in my brigade already on the truck grabbed Alex quickly and hid him. Monia and her daughter were already on the truck. Driving quickly from the ghetto in the pitch dark you could cut the silence with a knife. In the early dawn the sight of German soldiers brought an involuntary shudder to me. After many fear-filled hours we arrive in Ballel. The German driver had been specially bribed to speed our arrival in Ballel.

As we disembarked our friends kept on kissing the children. Taking them into the barn we washed and fed them. We set forth for the farm burdened with the children's things and with what we were bringing the farmers. Our friends kissed the children good-bye, wished them well and prayed that we would all be together again in the future. With two heavy packs to haul it was a good thing that I was young and strong. Alex and I separated from Monia; each pair going to its farmer.

The lady of the house responded to my knock on the door. Seeing Alex she broke into tears. I was happy to hear her promises that she would look after him as if he were her own child. Maybe, after all, this is the place that will keep Alex safe and free from the Nazi murderers.

Setting her table with food she called her children into the house to meet Alex. Shaking hands the children began to play without hesitation. The kindness of these people made me feel truly fortunate to have found such a good hiding place for Alex.

I asked her to promise me that she would take Alex to Kovno at the end of the war in case nobody came for him. I informed her that there would be a committee there that would take the

child and reward her well. I showed her the medallion that Alex was wearing around his neck – inscribed with his name and the names of his parents. She promised to do as I asked, kissed me and thanked me for the gifts I had brought.

I kissed Alex quickly and ran back to my brigade before he got a chance to cry. I felt numb as I ran, the tears streaming down my face. I came upon Monia also running with tears streaming down her face. Neither one of us looked back or said a single word – there was nothing to say. The late hour preoccupied us for the brigade was waiting for us to return home.

We could see the farmers walking through the fields after their long workday. The fact that they were going home to their wives and children made me envious. “Where are our children?” I mused. Who are we going home to? What great sins did our children commit to have to be separated from their loved ones? They were only four years old. Their only sin, it seemed, was that they were born Jewish. Monia’s cries echo my thoughts: “What crimes did the children commit to be hidden away from those that love them?” I can’t stand to hear those thoughts expressed out loud and tell her to stop asking me questions. “Ask God,” I tell her. “I don’t have any answers. I am in the same boat you’re in. My heart is also breaking.”

When we arrived at our brigade we found everyone eating together. Broken-hearted and exhausted we were unable to eat. We shared our portions with the Germans who, accepted with humor, telling us in German, “Deutschland, Deutschland, uber alles, zvai kertofel dos is alles” (Germany, Germany, over all, two potatoes and that is all). Monia and I had only some cheese and butter that our farmer gave us.

Monia and I sat in silence, two broken women, as the truck approached the ghetto. Pina, pale and sad, stood waiting and greeted us with the observation that this has been the longest day of his life. I assured him that Alex would be sleeping in a nice clean bed for I had found the perfect place. Speaking of the farm lady’s genuine goodness I had almost convinced myself that she was a Jew. I felt lucky that I could see Alex every day.

Just then Monia ran up to Pina to tell him that a Lithuanian woman, my farmer’s wife’s sister-in-law, had taken in her daughter for safekeeping. My farmer’s wife said she would come to our workplace early in the morning and give us regards from Alex. This would be better for Alex

than seeing us she said, so he would get used to her and the children and perhaps not be so homesick.

Our home was empty without Alex – every corner of the house seeming to cry for him. Even now we still doubted the wisdom of hiding our son so far from home. The ghetto had exacted a very high price, robbing us of my young parents and my fourteen-year-old sister – and now by our own choice our son was also gone.

Pina observed that we had sent our son away to lighten the burden in our hearts. I disagreed feeling that we acted in this manner to avoid witnessing our son's murder. When I asked him if he agreed, he responded, "Maybe this time, but perhaps it would be better if his fate were the same as ours. If we are destined to be killed let us be killed together." I pointed out to him that it was our obligation to save Alex. Trembling, he walked over, kissed me and said, "You are right. We have no choice. Now my duty is to join the underground and get arms and ammunitions." I asked no questions about that fearing that the walls had ears.

Night passed quickly and I had to be ready at daybreak to leave once again. My sister-in-law arrived before dawn and brought me some goods to trade for food. When she noticed Alex's absence I explained that I had taken him out to the village to hide him. She broke into tears and I soon joined her. She ran off to tell Hershel the sad news. Pina walked to the truck with me, kissed Monia and me, and sent kisses for the children.

Monia and I cried the whole trip saying little except that both children were happy and well cared for. She felt as though the children had already been gone a year, saying, "Now my loneliness really begins." I tried to comfort her by saying that children who are playing forget their worries. "That's probably what is happening to our children," I told her. Her trembling lips asked, "How did your husband react to Alex leaving?" I assured her that Pina was an understanding and logical man who has accepted our fate.

I have to cut our conversation short because she just can't stop crying.

CHAPTER 4

Coming into Ballel we could see our children's new mothers running toward our truck. As they reached us their first communication was to extend our children's warm regards. They informed us that the children were good playmates getting along very well, without fighting. Hearing that our children were well Monia and I broke into tears. The ladies comforted us telling us that they heard on the radio that Lithuania would soon be free.

Just then the village priest walked up to us. He promised to take our children into the church in case of any sign of danger. This made me realize that not all Lithuanians were Nazi collaborators. He handed me a box of butter and cheese for the old folks' home in the ghetto. Overcome by this I kissed his hand. Thereafter, the priest came to our work site often to give us regards from the children and to bring more butter and cheese for our friends in the ghetto.

After he left, the Lithuanian ladies returned to make a request of us. They asked us not to come see the children that week. It seemed they got very upset and cried a lot after we left. These words brought more tears to our eyes but we promised not to come. I gave Alex's caretaker goods for her and for her children and sweets for Alex and the others.

I couldn't stay away from Alex entirely. When I went out into the countryside to trade goods I would go to the farmhouse and peek in the windows. I could see that Alex was clean and happy, playing well with the children. Noticing how clean and neat his bed was made me feel even more assured. I looked in on him like this for the entire week. I could honestly tell Pina that he was happy and well cared for. Our hope was that this lady would continue to look after him as well as she was now doing until the end of the war.

Meanwhile the mood in the ghetto was somber. There was yet another rumor about a roundup of children – the rumor quickly spread throughout the ghetto like wild fire. Everyone hid their children in the bunkers because it was impossible to know exactly when this roundup would take place. We felt fortunate that Alex was no longer in the ghetto. Yet we were also fearful that the Lithuanian couple might not be able to keep him for as long as it was necessary.

The next day I arose early to join my work brigade. Pina walked me to the truck. It was only a month since Alex had left but to him it felt like a year. He was terribly lonesome and had trouble eating and sleeping.

I sensed that something was different today and I told Monia about it. Despite her efforts to comfort me I couldn't wait to get to the work site to see Alex. The drive seemed to take forever and the feeling of foreboding continued to fester within me. The sight of the lady at the work site filled me with fear. With her tear-stained face she gave me the bad news at once. Someone had betrayed her and reported that she was hiding a Jewish child. She was told that for her own good she must return the child.

Without waiting for her to finish her account I ran to the farmhouse for Alex. I didn't take time to tell Monia what had happened. As she ran to catch up to me I told her I was getting Alex. Without asking why she ran quickly to get her daughter.

Alex was sitting in the farmhouse, sad and forlorn, as if he knew something was wrong. His first question was "How is papa? Are the bad people still in the ghetto?" I told him that I was taking him back to the ghetto and that we would all hide in the bunker. His eyes glued to me Alex blurted out tearfully, "Mama, I want to live."

As we both cried together I couldn't find the words to comfort him. I promised myself then that I would eventually find another place. I tried to assure him that he would live to grow up a fine young man and a good son to his parents. This seemed to calm him down. His next question was whether his papa knew that he was coming home. I answered, "No," adding that I myself hadn't known I would have to bring him home. Alex said good-bye to the children kissing them and their mother. The children begged him to come back because they loved him. His command of Lithuanian was quite good.

I left all my goods with the lady who gave me in return two geese, butter, eggs and cheese from her cellar. Handing me a small sack of buns she told Alex that I would make the same kind of buns for him. Out of gratitude I left many of his things with them. This had truly been an ideal place for him. Tearfully she told me that if anything bad happened to Alex she would have it on her conscience for the rest of her life. With that she said farewell.

Alex hung on to my hand tightly, fearful that I would leave him in another place. Yet I knew I must find another place away from the ghetto for I had no confidence in the bunkers.

All the old problems of finding a hiding place whirled through my mind anew. Not the least was the worry about those people who took your gold or money only to betray you. I was bringing Alex back to the ghetto just when fear ran rampant there.

Monia also brought her daughter back to the ghetto. She told me that her lady had also been betrayed. The children were happy to see each other. They held hands as they walked. We cautioned them not to speak to anyone or ask questions. At the work site the others took our parcels and told us to get into the truck with our children, to get out of sight. That is not all that we hid – we hid our fears from our children.

When the Germans in charge of our brigade saw the children they demanded money. All the people in the brigade contributed without hesitation. Taking the money the German in charge told us to take the children into the woods. He said that before the brigade left in the evening one of the Germans would come to take us back to the truck.

The wait with the children in the forest lasted for what seemed like an eternity. At least the children were with us and not in the hands of the Gestapo. The children could not understand why they were alone in the woods with their mothers rather than with the rest of the brigade.

Finally a German soldier approached carrying his gun. At this sight we all got so excited about going back home to the ghetto that we cried together. Yet I could not for a moment forget the new problems facing us. The question of finding another place for the children had no ready answer. I reassured Monia that we would find another place. Hope was the only thing to sustain us. At least, in an emergency, we could hide our children in the bunker.

I told Monia that I didn't know how Pina would react to the sight of Alex. I knew that he was lonesome for his son but feared for the boy's life in the ghetto.

When we got to the trucks the men of the brigade kissed and hugged the children overjoyed to see them safe. On the trucks they separated the children seating them among the adults and moving very close together so that the children could not be seen. We prayed that we could just get past the patrol point in Vilkamir. My heart felt as if it would leave my body as it pounded

louder than the truck's engine. The adrenaline rushing through my veins at least strengthened my resolve.

Everyone silently anticipated the approaching control point. The children fortunately were sound asleep, spared the great fears that beset us. From afar all seemed quiet at the checkpoint. Getting closer the driver suddenly accelerated the truck getting us through safely.

A short time later the driver stopped the truck. Everyone was sure our hearts could be heard pounding. The German soldier who retrieved us from the woods boarded the truck to tell us that we had brought the children safely through. He wished us luck in our goal of saving them. His words touched us so deeply that we all cried together with him. When I asked him if he was a father he responded he had four children whom he missed very much. He didn't seem very anxious to leave us. He was soon called back into the cab of the truck. On our way again we were thankful that the children were still asleep. The seemingly endless trip back to the ghetto reminded me of the unending suffering of the Jewish people.

As we neared the ghetto we were stopped by a German patrol that boarded the truck to search it. Instantly I handed one soldier some butter while another woman handed over some smoked meat. They were so excited with the food that they jumped off the truck and waved the driver on. We were overcome with relief. Monia covered the children with coats and sweaters. The children remained sound asleep through whole incident. Everybody hugged and kissed me for my quick thinking and good luck. I modestly assured them that my good fortune was due to the German's hunger.

At the ghetto gate the night was still so pitch black that we could not see who was waiting for us. But I was certain that my husband and my brother would be there. The chief driver approached the gates to advise his superior that they had brought two children back to the ghetto. When we woke the children they didn't know where they were. When we informed them that they had come home Alex's first question was, "Did papa come to take us home?" I assured him that he was there.

The men quickly unloaded the truck while we took the children off. Two bribed SS officers approached asking if these were the two children we were bringing back into the ghetto. Hearing an affirmative response they told us to disappear immediately. Pina ran up, grabbed Alex and ran

into the ghetto. Everyone moved swiftly, afraid of an unsympathetic SS officer approaching the gates. Pina ran so quickly with Alex that I couldn't catch up to them. I was totally exhausted both physically and emotionally. Pina ran into the depths of the ghetto where he waited for me. I slowly walked up to him. His first utterance concerned his great surprise over seeing the children.

Hershel who also came to the gates brought some of my packs in. Seeing Alex back home he began to cry. He loved Alex very much especially since he as yet had no children of his own. As we entered the house it seemed as if the house itself was happy to see Alex. While Hershel kept crying my practical husband quietly undressed Alex, gave him a glass of milk and put him to bed.

I too went to bed but I could not sleep. I was physically and emotionally drained. I asked Pina, "Are you happy that I brought Alex back to the ghetto?" A few words from him said it all: "God has watched over him until now and will again watch and protect him." He asked me to stay home the next day, as I was so tired. He felt that it would be good for all of us if I spent the day with Alex. He went to the workhouse leaving Alex and me sleeping but I didn't sleep long. I prepared lunch and set the table for my two men.

It was a sheer pleasure once again to sit down to eat as a family. I couldn't take my eyes off of Alex and kept wondering how long we would be together. Alex was very happy to be home and he made his father promise to come back as soon as possible. I gave Alex his toys to play with and some storybooks.

Alex told me that when he was at the farmer's house, lying in his bed, he would see his father and me standing at his bed. Of course, it was only a dream. To me his vision meant that he was happy to be home and wanted never to leave us again. I prayed with all my heart that his wish would come true. Still one never knew what great surprises the Nazi murderers would spring on us tomorrow.

Even though the bunker was ready and waiting I did not feel that it was a safe place for my child. I kept telling Pina that I was sure the Nazis would not keep us in the ghetto very long. We would stay just as long as we could work and they had a need for us. They had their long-range plans worked out well, knowing just how many days, hours, and minutes we would be useful to them.

I decided that I didn't want to be a part of the Ballel work brigade anymore as the village was no longer safe for the children. I had to find a new place for Alex in the city.

When Pina came home from work I told him everything about the farmer who had hidden Alex. I told him how well he was treated and looked after. I really felt that the farmwoman had done it more out of compassion than for the money. I also commended the sister-in-law who had looked after Monia's daughter as if she were her own, and cried when she had to give her back. I related the difficulties we encountered in bringing the children home. Listening carefully all the while Pina said he was happy to have Alex home yet fearful because the bunker was really not a safe place. I tried to comfort him and to assure him that the war would soon be over.

There is a Jewish saying: "Man makes plans but God laughs." Even if that loses something in translation it proved to apply in our case. Exactly one week later the Nazis surrounded the ghetto. We took Alex and Monia's daughter to the bunker along with Monia's mother-in-law.

This time we were certain that the Nazis would take the children and the remainder of the old people. The children had been cautioned to behave as they were told and not to cry or speak. The bunker was constructed in such a way that those inside could hear what was going on outside but those outside could not hear what was going on inside.

When they searched a house the Germans allowed the people to mingle outside while they searched basements, attics, and all corners. When they finished searching they made a mark on the house to show that it had already been investigated. Hershel was the lookout and would let us know when they had passed the bunker. We could not only hear the Nazis searching the houses but also their footsteps above the bunkers. We understood that we had been betrayed because of jealousy – not an uncommon event in the ghetto.

We trembled as we heard the Nazi shout, "Let's get the dynamite." Suddenly all was quiet. Hershel got on the roof of the house and through the chimney shouted to us that we should dig our way out and he would dig his way in toward us. With no time to waste we were quickly dug out. Hershel grabbed Alex and ran six blocks away. Monia, her daughter and mother-in-law then ran from the house.

Hershel left Alex with friends, running back in time to see the Nazis blowing up the house and the bunker. Thanks to him we had all survived. I ran to the house where he had taken Alex. After

an hour had passed I gave Alex a sleeping pill to keep him from crying. The Nazis were running around like wild animals looking for their victims.

I looked outside to see what was happening. The SS had rounded up hundreds and hundreds of our beloved children onto trucks. The children were crying and begging their parents to rescue them. The cries of these doomed children were enough to open the heavens but nobody could help them now. They kept crying for their mothers who ran after the trucks crying and screaming for their children. But the world was deaf to their heartbreaking cries – as if drowned out by the music that was playing on the trucks.

We stood helplessly watching people running and hanging on to the trucks. Others threw themselves under the trucks. The pathetic children's cries and screams broke our hearts. The murderous Germans watched unmoved by what they were doing. We mothers witnessing this horror knew that these precious children were being taken to Auschwitz to be gassed.

The Nazis continued their roundup grabbing children as they found them and throwing them into the trucks as if they were sacks of flour. A terrible, still sadness hung over the ghetto, like the pain of a limb that had been hacked off. Those who had hidden their children in bunkers went to get them out. We at least knew that the murderous Nazis would not be back again this night.

The situation for the remaining children in the ghetto now immediately became more urgent. Every moment of every day, our innocent, precious children were at risk. Their lives barely begun, the Nazis could come back at any time to snuff out what was left of them. Late at night, we searched the ghetto to see if any children might have hidden themselves, but we found none. Our troubles began all over again. To build another bunker was certainly no solution. Now it was imperative to find a place outside the ghetto entirely, in the city.

CHAPTER 5

My days of going to Ballel were over. Instead I looked for a work brigade that would take me to the city. I approached the gates and asked to be assigned to the laundry brigade that does the laundry for the regular army. I was fortunate to get that assignment.

As I left for the first day of work I asked Pina to take Alex to the workhouse with him. My work brigade left the ghetto under the watch of the regular army instead of the SS, which made us feel a little freer. Some of the soldiers had genuine pity for our lot. The floor lady who was like a foreman or supervisor turned out to be a kind Lithuanian woman who treated us well.

During the first week I did not have an opportunity to speak to the floor lady. I was afraid to tell her that I had Alex in the ghetto. Beside myself, there were nine women working in the laundry. Six of them were not mothers while two had children they were hiding in bunkers. The ninth woman, an unfortunate soul had lost her child in the recent roundup. That could not keep her from going to work.

For that matter nobody wanted to go to work after the roundup. We had no choice, however, as we were driven in tears out of our houses. Suddenly a high-ranking army officer entered the room greeting the floor lady with a “Heil Hitler.” When she explained why we were crying he looked bewildered. Could it be, I wondered, that the regular army does not know what the SS are doing to the Jews? Glaring at us he asked, “Is this true?”

After a dead silence of a few seconds the words tumbled from my mouth and my heart: “These are your countrymen. Your murderous brothers have killed our children. Why? Tell us why. Such innocent children, the only reason being that they had Jewish parents. Tell us. Answer us.”

I stared right into his eyes trying to figure out if he felt anything, any sympathy for us, or if his heart was made out of stone like the hearts of his murderous brothers. Seething with anger I added, “Listen to me you German murderers. You can’t kill us all. And if only one Jew is left alive we will again be a people. And then we will have our revenge.” He listened to me in silence. Then he called the floor lady out of the room to tell her something.

She came back after a few minutes to tell us that the officer said we should eat. As we sat down to eat all the women kissed me and praised me for my bravery at speaking out to a high-ranking officer – without showing any fear. I answered, “The worst thing he could have done was to shoot me. What do I have to lose? If not today, tomorrow.” My only concern was to save Alex. He must survive to avenge the millions of our people who have been murdered.

The rest of the day we accomplished little at work. With approaching evening two soldiers arrived to drive us back to the ghetto. The floor lady gave each of us some bread and sugar telling us that the officer ordered her to give it to us to take home.

Arriving at the ghetto gates depressed we heard the plaintive cries from virtually every home as we passed through the ghetto. Life must go on, however, and I was resigned to the fact that we must go to work each day. Pain was an inescapable part of our existence.

Entering our house I found Alex playing. I gave him a piece of bread sprinkled with sugar to eat. Just seeing Alex made me feel like the whole world was mine. I told Pina of my hope of finding a hiding place with the floor lady’s help. I mentioned that she seemed like a very motherly person. She must have children of her own. I will find out when I get the opportunity.

We had a young girl Shayna living with us who had escaped the roundup. She stayed home with Alex while we went to work. She looked after Alex very well and he loved her very much. I found it very hard to sleep that night. I arose early, gathered some goods for trading, told Shayna to take good care of Alex, kissed Alex and Pina and went to the ghetto gates. Yankl Werbowski was already there in the lineup along with several brigades. Everyone was depressed their heads hanging low and hardly able to speak to one another.

Every brigade had people crying for their children or their friends’ children. How can you comfort a mother in such deep pain with wounds so fresh? What can you possibly say? I could see the envy on the faces of those mothers as they saw us with our children. It seemed impossible for people to help one another in these circumstances.

When the time arrived for our brigade to leave, our brigade leader saw to it that everyone was there. When we arrived at our work site our leader sent us into our laundry room. The floor lady looked very sad as she distributed the work. We went to our work tired, depressed, and hungry – but we worked.

She gave us bread and sugar when we left. This sustained our lives but it was not my life that I was thinking about. She handed me many pairs of men's socks to repair. Despite trembling hands I repaired them anyway. I continually sought an opportunity to bring up the question of Alex with her. I would ask her for the time frequently. The time, in fact, went by extremely slowly. Unable to fix too many pairs of socks I bluffed my way through as many pairs as I could.

I kept my eyes and ears open looking for an opportunity to speak to the floor lady. Not until the following week did I get an opportunity to know her a little better. I spoke to her quite openly. She had a beautiful head of blonde hair and I asked her if she would let me set it. She said that tomorrow would be her day off and I could do it then.

I got very excited for I knew that I could speak to her then about Alex face to face. If she had a child, I thought perhaps she will be sympathetic in my time of great need. I didn't even know if she was married or what her home situation was. But I would have all my answers tomorrow. Being desperate I was reaching for straws. The only thing that was important was that Alex should not remain in the ghetto.

My anxiety to tell Pina my latest plans made me impatient for the day to end. Arriving home at last I told him what had transpired. I had the distinct feeling that it would go well but I was once again impatient – for tomorrow. The night seemed to take forever barring me from sleep. I cried every time I looked over at Alex. He still slept as I left but Pina was awake to walk me to the gates. Brigade members were already there as Pina wished me luck before departing.

As we drove through the gates accomplishing my goal was the only thing on my mind. Riding through Kovno I could see scores of former Lithuanian friends walking the streets freely while we were being driven to work sites at gunpoint. Coffee and bread were waiting for us in our laundry room. There was not much to wash today but the material was heavy and hard to handle.

At lunch time the floor lady asked me to clean her room making me tense yet joyful with anticipation. When she brought me soup and bread I ate the soup but saved the bread to take home. I also saved the sugar that she brought with a cup of coffee. She returned after I had finished eating.

I was surprised that a Lithuanian woman would have a name like Bertha. She explained that the Germans had trouble pronouncing her real name, Alatalia. I noticed a pan of hot water in the

corner ready for washing her hair. After she offered me a cigarette I started to work slowly on her hair to give me time for conversation. When she revealed that she was not married I was a little stunned. I became encouraged, however, when she added that her twelve-year-old sister lived with her and her boyfriend.

With this I moved right into my objective and asked her if she would be willing to hide my child. Before she could answer, I added that I would pay her and suggested that her little sister would be able to take care of him. I told her that Alex had blue eyes and fair hair and didn't look Jewish.

She listened attentively to everything I said but did not answer immediately. My constant crying however was a cue for her to comfort me. Stating that it was helpful that Alex had blue eyes and did not look Jewish she asked if he understood and spoke Lithuanian. I answered that he spoke only a few words but understood everything.

She then looked me in the eye and asked if I had any gold. My heart palpitating strongly I responded that I had a few Russian ten-ruble gold pieces and a heavy gold bracelet. After a moment of thought she informed me that she would give me her answer tomorrow. At this point I wondered about whom her boyfriend could be – a cop or a member of the Gestapo or the SS?

When I finished her hair she gave me some bread and candy to take home to Alex. Thanking her I voiced my hope that I would have her answer the next day. She assured me that she would do everything in her power to save Alex, which strengthened my belief in her good will. She was definitely sympathetic yet fearful of taking the risk associated with such a venture. She mentioned the warning in the newspaper forbidding the hiding of Jews or their children.

I tried to encourage her by saying the Russians were nearing Lithuania and reminded her that the gold I would give her would enable her to buy anything. Once more she repeated that I would have her answer tomorrow. She said she would station me apart from the other workers tomorrow so that we could talk without being overheard. She brought me some more coffee and a pack of cigarettes. The cigarettes calmed my nerves. She thanked me for setting her hair so nicely. I left her feeling hopeful about tomorrow.

When the work leader came for us each of us had a little package of food to take home. I was the happiest of all for I could tell Pina that we could expect an answer tomorrow. Arriving home I

found only Shayna and Alex there. Pina was always busy doing things of which I knew nothing even though he had told us he was working with the underground. Only later while we were being transported to Germany did I find out that he was helping to bring ammunition to the partisans in the woods. None of the wives for that matter knew of their husbands' activities.

I played with Alex and gave him the candies, which he immediately shared with Shayna. She loved him very much and did everything for him and with him. Looking into his face only brought tears to my eyes so I turned away to hide my face.

Now the task of making preparations for getting him to Bertha loomed in my mind. Steeleed myself realizing that the task got more difficult each time. Alex ran into Pina's arms as he entered the house – a picture etched in my mind.

As we sat around the dining table I itched to tell Pina of my talk with Bertha. He was overjoyed to hear but I kept to myself my concerns about her boyfriend – as much to spare him as to keep myself from going mad with fear. I sensed that he had similar thoughts.

After finishing the meal, we all retired but once again, sleep was a stranger to me. Lying in bed I talked to Pina. "She acts very aloof when she is our boss," I stated, "but we have to take it because we are their slaves." Pina, smiling, expressed confidence in my ability to handle the situation.

I got up to get some coffee and a cigarette thinking through my plans for the next day. Pina awoke and joined me. We discussed our parents' former neighbors, a Lithuanian army major and his wife, a gynecologist. They were good people with well-behaved children and they looked Jewish – with dark hair and eyes. They were friends of the Jews always trying to help them in any way they could. They owned a large dairy farm near Panamune from which they often brought fresh cheese and butter to my parents.

They were hiding a number of Jews, but they only wanted Jews without children, for they were afraid that the noise and crying would jeopardize their operation. They had both come to a Jewish work brigade in town one day asking if anyone knew the brigade in which I worked. The wife sought a place to hide Alex that would allow us to hide with them and the forty-eight other Jews they were helping. When he finally found me I told him that I had found a place for Alex

but he seemed skeptical. Wishing me good luck he said that he would return to my work place in a few days.

When he visited he always had something to give me usually something his wife had sent for Alex. He would enter the ghetto with a work brigade wearing a yellow Star of David. On one occasion, when everyone was to be searched a member of the ghetto committee whisked him out of line to escape the search but the work leader counted him as part of the work force. Everyone knew how he risked his life to help the Jews.

We knew only too well that our lives would be finished the moment the Germans realized the war was over for them. That night listening to the radio hidden in the basement Pina heard that the Russian front was approaching us. This news electrified me making me more anxious than ever to get Alex back into hiding.

I impatiently joined my brigade the next morning. Bertha greeted me with a smile ordering me to work in the kitchen that day. When I protested that I had never cooked a day in my life she promised to help me. In a good mood, she told me under her breath that her boyfriend wanted two thousand American dollars and a few men's suits. I promptly agreed telling her that I would bring these things the next day. She promised to take Alex tomorrow night. Bursting into tears I begged her to treat him well as if he were her own son. She told me not to worry assuring me that she would. Once again those mixed emotions over parting with Alex seized me.

We terminated the conversation to prevent being overheard by the other two Lithuanian women working in the kitchen. Writing on a piece of paper I asked what time she wanted to come for Alex. She held up seven fingers. I then drew a diagram on the paper showing her where to meet me.

These arrangements concluded, my mind now turned to the details of sneaking Alex out of the ghetto. I felt like an experienced professional at this ploy by this time. Not only had I gotten Alex out but also many children now grown up living in Australia and the United States had escaped through my efforts. As the thought of separation came back a fresh scar began to etch itself on my heart.

I had no time to dwell on this for I had much to do, packing Alex's things and arranging with the guard for the time when I would bring Alex to the fence. The suits would not be easy to bring out

but I could wear the pants and ask the men to wear the jackets. Then I thought of the death penalty promised for anyone caught with foreign currency but how trivial compared to the thought of the task at hand. Unable to keep my mind on my work I kept dropping things.

Finally we finished work and Bertha distributed her usual bread and sugar to everyone. She also handed me a little package of candies and cookies for Alex. On the ride home I mentally rehearsed my plans again. I thought about the fact that Monia had not yet found a place for her girl. I resolved to keep my good news from her to avoid envy but to share it with her only after I have helped her to find a place.

Arriving home looking at his blue eyes reminded me of his fate saddening me almost beyond endurance. He jumped into my arms as if it had been a year since he had seen me. It felt like a year for me as well as I wondered when Pina and I would again see him. Pina arrived shortly afterward and promptly told me that other mothers had adopted the same plan to find hiding places for their children in the city. Listening impatiently to his stories I informed him that Bertha would be coming to take Alex at the fence next to the Christian cemetery. I also mentioned the price to which I had agreed. Grabbing and hugging Alex Pina tried to hide his tears. When Alex asked him why he was crying both Pina and I sobbed uncontrollably and smothered Alex with kisses.

Bathing and dressing him I informed him that another lady would be taking him to her home. I mentioned her twelve-year-old sister and said she would take care of him and teach him Lithuanian. We tried to explain to Alex, obviously unhappy, that the ghetto was unsafe for him and we didn't want to see the Nazis come back and take him. Patting him on the head Pina promised that we would take him back from the lady one day.

The time came all too swiftly for Pina, Shayna and me to take Alex to the fence. He loved Shayna as if she were a second mother to him. As he held her hand we all cried together. This parting had all the solemnity of a Yom Kippur – as well as the uncertainty of what plans God had for our family.

Alex kept asking questions: “Will you come to see me? Will papa and Shayna come to see me?” I assured him that I would relay regards from him through the lady to Shayna and his father. I instructed him to call her “mama” all the time to avoid a slip-up that would cause suspicion in

anyone visiting her home. Pina's eyes never left his son for a moment. We spotted Bertha in the distance waiting to take Alex through the gate. The guard quickly let Alex through and she grabbed him passing through the cemetery and out of sight. I slipped the guard some money and a gold wristwatch and we too quickly disappeared.

We all cried on the walk home but Pina was uncontrollable for a while. We consoled one another as best we could. Deep in my heart I feared that Bertha would return Alex. I told myself that this was preferable to having my child betrayed and handed over to the Gestapo. By this time I would go along with anything even if it were temporary. His safety was never assured for more than a day at a time anyway. I kept my fears to myself. I tried to convince myself that Bertha was a woman of goodwill who was risking her life even in coming for him.

Sheer exhaustion sent me right to bed but sleep eluded me again. In my anxiety for morning to come all kinds of thoughts raced through my mind: Will they get drunk on Sunday when they stay home? Will a slip of the tongue to the wrong person give Alex away? If this place is not safe, are there any other alternatives? The Lithuanians of Kovno were my friends yesterday but now untold numbers of them helped the Germans in their murderous designs.

None of us could sleep. I got myself some tea while Shayna smoked cigarettes. She reminded me of our good fortune in finding a hiding place for Alex. The look of concern on her face, however, did not match her words of encouragement. I readied the two pairs of suit pants and the matching jackets for the men in the brigade to wear.

Saying good-bye to Pina and Shayna I took my things and proceeded to the gates. Dr. Natkin was very helpful having prepared everything for me quietly and confidentially. At the workplace at 9:00 a.m., Bertha greeted us in the kitchen and distributed our work. I could hardly wait to learn how Alex has spent his first night with her.

Several hours had passed before she sent for me to clean her room. There I gave her the two men's suits and the gold broach that had belonged to my mother. Pleased she informed me that Alex spoke to her in Yiddish, which she could understand because she spoke German. She noted also that she found Alex to be bright. I responded that the times made him smart but his luck was not as promising: it was his misfortune to have been born a Jew at the worst of times.

She assured me that he would get used to her and that she would treat him as if he were her own child. She added that her sister liked him very much and would also help to take good care of him. Reassured by these words I prayed that nothing would happen to change my good fortune – and began crying. Handing me a cup of coffee she kept comforting me telling me that Alex was in good hands. I trembled, at a loss for words.

I went through the same old doubts again: the uncertainty, the risk, the mistrust, and the lack of alternatives. I could only tell myself to trust and to be thankful that he was out of the ghetto.

At lunchtime I asked Bertha's permission to stay in her room away from the others. She suggested that it would look suspicious if I remained so I joined the others. As I was unable to eat anything Bertha packed my lunch along with food left over by the Germans for Pina and Shayna.

I was uncertain how Alex was doing but I was also impatient to get home to share what I knew with Pina. We left the work place along with another brigade from another work place. Arriving at the gates with our packages we were thankful that the murderers such as Keitel or Gecke were not there. We had given Gecke the nickname "The Death Head." We called the gate "clean" when no SS were present.

Pina and Shayna met me at the gates and I wasted no time sharing my news with them. Alex had slept well and eaten well I informed them as they listened with tears. They were openly happy that he was out of the ghetto.

Every corner of the empty house seemed to cry out for Alex. Everywhere I looked was filled with images of him sitting, eating, sleeping, and playing. Shayna unpacked the food package I gave her containing salami, sugar, and butter. All of us were very exhausted and hungry. I ate first and then laid down.

Sitting beside me Pina asked me about Alex. I could only repeat the assurances I had already given him. He suggested that I should bring Bertha more jewelry so I decided to buy some beads and other costume jewelry in the ghetto. Bertha became accustomed to my bringing her something every day.

One week passed – seven long days and nights – and Alex was still with Bertha. Looking around the ghetto I saw other children walking with their parents while mine was in a house of strangers. I pondered the possibility of bringing him back thinking of his father's and my loneliness. I felt as though I would crumble under the strain. Not too long ago I felt the envy of the mothers of children who had been rounded up; now it was my time to be envious. Why did my child have to live with strangers?

For my own peace of mind I tried to focus on Alex's welfare rather than on our loss. The fear and doubt that clung to each minute made me realize the importance of living life as it happened. For his part Pina was stoic about our situation. No matter how lonesome he got he never asked that we take Alex back to the ghetto.

Hershel visiting us noticed Alex's absence immediately and asked if we had once again secreted him. He also told me that he had met a gypsy friend of mine on his work brigade who had expressed concern for Alex. Before the war she had visited me with her children. She now offered to help me in any way she could, saying that she would call for me at my work place.

Another week of safety for Alex passed. We all felt fortunate that he was being well fed and cared for. Today my usual doubts and fears were replaced by an even more depressing thought, which I shared with Hershel. As Jews, there was little we could do. We were prisoners cut off from the free world.

My friend the Lithuanian major came again to visit me at my work place. Wanting to know if Pina and I would come to hide at his farm he was still unable to get a definite answer from me. I was still not totally convinced of Alex's safety.

Not many days later, after Bertha continuously avoided my eyes when I arrived to work, instantly making my heart skip a beat I needed to confront her. I had intended to give her a small package on the sly, but this little sign distracted me. Sensing that something was terribly wrong I wondered if she wanted more money or if she wanted to give Alex back. The change in her was quite visible with each passing hour. With a chance at last to talk to me alone she bluntly informed me that she would have to bring Alex back to me. The exchange was to take place at 7:00 at the gate on the other side near the mill where it would be easier to get Alex back in. She had no time to explain why this was necessary.

The day was impossible for me as I kept thinking about another roundup. Numbed by this latest development I speculated that perhaps it was Alex's lot to be shifted from place to place. I consoled myself with the fact that Bertha didn't betray him after taking the money and suits.

At last Bertha met with me looking obviously distraught. She tried to comfort and soothe me. She explained that one day, after she had gone to the store to buy something, Alex had gone into the yard and had begun talking to the other children in Yiddish. A Lithuanian boy not understanding him told his parents of this little boy speaking a very strange language. The father, a policeman, approached Alex asking him where he lived. Alex said he was from the ghetto and that he was hiding here from the Germans.

The policeman went to Bertha's house knocked on the door with no answer and found it locked. Waiting until Bertha returned home he reminded her of the German edict. Not wanting to turn Alex over to the Gestapo, as he could not take the responsibility for a child's death, he suggested that she return him to his family. This would leave both consciences clear.

I decided to keep nothing from Pina, which left me with mixed feelings. He sighed as I told him everything. He consoled me that we must do all we could even though Alex's ultimate destiny might be out of our hands. Now the problem was how to get him back in. With little time to arrange the bribery of the guard at the gate I grabbed a gold ring and ran to the gate giving it to the guard. I instructed him that at 7:00 my child would be brought back.

At the appointed hour Pina, Shayna and I, broken-hearted, were at the gate. Standing like a zombie I could see Bertha coming with Alex – bringing nothing with her as I had instructed her. Keeping a close watch on the German guard she quickly lifted the gate to let Alex through as the guard turned away. Grabbing him I started running with Pina and Shayna in pursuit. They grabbed him and ran away too rapidly for me to keep up. Hearing a shot I didn't even turn to see what had happened. Bertha told me the next day that a guard had spotted her leaving and had taken a shot at her.

When we arrived home, Alex did not leave his father's lap for one moment. Happy as Alex was to be home, the whole house seemed to reflect his mood. Hershel and his wife Chena, visiting, smothered Alex with hugs and kisses. Poor Alex was very tired.

Alex was very bright and we could never fool him. He felt he knew why he was back in the ghetto. Asking constantly if he would have to leave again tomorrow he stated emphatically that he would never do it. I could only promise him that we would be together only so long as circumstances permitted. I considered each day we had with Alex a gift.

I basked in his presence so much that I did not want to go off to work. But the need for food was of course a strong priority and the city was the only place where I could get it. Besides other families too were dependent on the food I brought. Pina, however, convinced me to stay home with Alex a few days assuring me that we had enough food to last for that period.

Alex loved to sit on my lap as I told him stories. Learning chess from Pina he caught on so quickly that I quipped that he would one day be the grand master of chess for Lithuania. My good fortune at having Alex was marred by my concern for his safety. With most of our gold and money gone my sole concern was having enough to get Alex to safety.

Once again the rumors started circulating. The Germans, people said, knew that many children were left in the ghetto and want to round up every last one and annihilate them. Our own lives were worthless as long as Alex's life was in danger. Once again I discussed with Pina the matter of finding a hiding place.

Easter approached. I decided to return to the laundry to resume work. I was thinking that Bertha might know of another place to hide Alex and that she might return some of my money. Deciding to join the brigade the next morning I prepared a parcel to take with me to trade for foodstuffs. Sleeping poorly I arose early and went to the gate.

When we arrived at the laundry I went to the kitchen to find Bertha alone. She avoided my eyes feeling very guilty. My hope that she would return some of the money was unrewarded for she did not return any of it. I was afraid to beg lest I lose even this job, which supplied food for all of us and sweets for Alex. As Bertha looked at me slyly with a guilty look on her face I realized that the money and any hope of her taking Alex again was gone forever.

I sought a way to discuss these matters with her. If she would not help me find a place out of compassion maybe she would do so simply as a cash transaction. The opportunity arose when she asked me to go to her room to wash her hair. Alone with me, she told me all her troubles. If the policeman had not been her neighbor she explained she would have paid with her life and

with Alex's life. It was a shame she said that Alex had left the house and had gone out into the yard. She expressed hope and faith that he would survive to live a long life.

Consoling me she gave me some coffee and cake. I saved the cake to take to Alex. As I set her hair I was reminded of the gypsy woman whose hair I had also cared for. I concluded my work hopeful and much happier. Bertha gave me some food to take home which included some leftovers from the Germans – this getting secreted in the large pockets of my dress.

On the way home I could not get the gypsy woman out of my mind. She lived near the barracks where my parents and little sister had been taken in 1941. The Germans, killing gypsies in many other countries spared them here allowing them to live unharmed in the barracks and in the mountains.

It seemed to me that this would be a safe place to hide Alex. Yet the fact that he had red hair and blue eyes was a disadvantage here. Who ever heard of a gypsy with such fair features? But need defies logic and so I decided to see her anyway. My intuition told me that this would be a safe place. Besides, in a storm any port is safe I convinced myself.

Arriving home I told Pina my thought about going to the gypsies. Not overjoyed with the idea he stated that they were not known for their cleanliness. Yet he conceded that we must try since we had no alternative. The trip to the fort by myself would be dangerous. The only thing to do was to bribe a German soldier with a rifle to accompany me. I don't know where I got the courage – the necessity of saving Alex was stronger than my fears, perhaps my youth supplying me with added strength.

Wasting no time I went to the gate that evening to speak to the guard. I told him I would pay him well if he would accompany me to the gypsy forts. With little hesitation he agreed to take me telling me to meet him early the next morning at the gate before the work brigades assembled. Although he had some free time then he would have to be back at his post later.

When I arrived in the morning as instructed the guard told me to join the brigade that works close to the gypsy fort. As we got to that site he told me to follow him and he led me to the gypsies. Seeing the scene that unfolded with its clay huts and old clothing strewn all over produced a feeling of desolation in me. This did not seem a suitable place for Alex. The guard could not understand my sudden tears.

Trying to compose myself I entered the house. To my surprise it was clean inside with a table in the center and two wooden barrels near the wall. My friend greeted me warmly and we kissed. Asking about the soldier it didn't take her long to figure out the reason for his presence. She quickly offered him some cake and coffee to keep his mouth busy.

She spoke to me in Lithuanian so that he would not understand. Coming right to the point I told her of my wish for her to hide my child. Only when she asked me if he had dark hair and eyes did I really accept the absurdity of my request. She apologized about not being able to hide Alex but promised to start looking for a place tomorrow.

She mentioned a great debt that she owed my parents and me. When I told her that my parents had been murdered she began to cry. She then went to the barrel containing meat and cut off a slab to give to the German as a reward for bringing me here. Writing down the address of my work site she promised that she would not forget to come see me. She urged me not to lose hope, as she was certain she could find a hiding place for Alex. With obvious sympathy and compassion she tearfully said good-bye to me. I remained disappointed and doubtful about finding a place for Alex. Rushing back to the work brigade with the guard I at least felt pleased with myself for even making the attempt to find a place even though I could point to no concrete accomplishment. Once back with the brigade I had to wait a few more hours until they were ready to return home. I was confident that the brigade leader, a friend of Pina's, would not say anything about my being there.

My mind was so beset with unanswered questions that I could not think anymore. I wanted to get home at least to quell Pina's fears about today's adventure as well as to let him know what happened. I had after all risked my life by going into town without wearing the yellow Star of David. I decided that the next day at my regular work place I would spend the entire time trying to find a hiding place. I had lost all interest in working there since there was no opportunity for a hiding place. Bertha always evaded my eye now. The gypsy, at least, was a friend I could trust.

A few days later we arrived at the work place to find the place deserted and locked up. Everyone had been sent to the front. Soon an officer appeared and led us to another barracks with another laundry room. A Lithuanian woman introduced herself as Lucy, our new floor lady. She told us that we will be well fed for our work but informed us that the German commander forbade our taking anything home. A friendly woman Lucy distributed the work and took a few of us to the

kitchen. The work was not hard and she did not drive us to work fast. We worked according to the amount of food we got: with less food, we worked less; with more food, we worked more.

Lucy proved to be very sympathetic and before long we felt as if she were one of us. I complimented her on her beautiful face and legs commenting that she must have been a ballerina. She revealed that she was in fact a dancer but gave it up when the soldiers began to harass her. She said that she was married and the mother of a five-year-old daughter with blonde hair and blue eyes. There was obvious love on her face when she spoke of her girl.

Here was a good mother, a fearless woman of character. My mind filled with possibilities for Alex. When I told Pina about her he seemed to think it would be an ideal environment. I was torn between the need to move with caution and the perilous condition of the ghetto these days. I made up my mind that I would not delay any longer than a day in approaching her about taking Alex.

I also knew something about her as a person because I worked for her. Unlike some of the other floor ladies who yelled and screamed and ordered people around Lucy politely asked us to do things. Unlike my spirits on other workdays I came home today without feeling tired because I was buoyed up by the hope and courage that meeting Lucy imparted to me.

When Pina arrived home that evening he had a most worried look on his face. After kissing us he immediately told us that he heard something new was about to happen in the ghetto. They were going to evacuate the ghetto but he didn't know when. From radios hidden in Pina's workhouse they heard that the Russians were getting close to the Baltic countries. When I asked him if he thought this was the time to ask Lucy he gave me an emphatic "yes".

After supper, Pina put Alex to bed but Alex stayed awake almost the entire night. He listened his eyes wide open to what we discussed. He knew what was happening and sensed the danger. At one point during the night he quietly said, "Please save me Mama, I want to live." Those words have followed me wherever I have gone to this day.

I cannot wait to talk to Lucy. My instinctive feeling that she will surely consent to hiding Alex fuels my eagerness. Some parents still talked about building bunkers but Pina and I felt that the time for bunkers was over. We always felt that the Nazis would send us to our deaths without permitting the advancing Russians to save us.

A strange mood pervaded the house when I awoke in the morning. I went to the gate carrying some money and my father's gold watch to talk business with Lucy. Yankl was already there, overseeing the dispatching of brigades. When I asked him if there was danger for children today he sighed deeply, looked directly into my eyes, and said the entire ghetto was in danger.

My feet could not move today and neither could anybody else's. A new German guard prodded us along, calling us a lazy bunch who were sleeping, not walking. "Move faster! You won't accomplish anything today." When I answered him that we would produce as much as they gave us to eat, to my surprise, he didn't respond. When the girls in my brigade chastised me for speaking up I angrily told them that I was not afraid of him.

Lucy who distributed the assignments, met us at our work site. She sent Marcia and me to chop wood accompanying us to show us how because she couldn't do it herself. We slowly chopped enough firewood to last half a day laughing and crying as we worked. When Marcia said she couldn't take this work I told her that she had better take it and with a smile on her face – otherwise she might get beaten by the Germans.

At lunchtime we had as much soup and bread as we could possibly have wanted. Finished with lunch, I sought an opportunity to speak with Lucy in private. She agreed with my request to be permitted to comb her hair into a nice hairdo for church on Sunday. In her room, I waited for the right moment, trembling and not knowing how to broach the subject. Realizing that Lithuanians would do anything for money or gold, I reasoned that I had a good chance. She came back into the room with water for washing her hair. While washing her hair, I asked her casually how her husband treated her and her daughter, and she responded that they had a very good family life. Hearing this good news buttressed my courage, and I proceeded to ask her the crucial question. Her immediate response was to ask, "Does the child look Jewish?" Acting puzzled, I asked her what a Jew looks like? She responded with "Long nose and dark hair." I informed her of Alex's small nose, blue eyes, and red hair.

Working slowly, I made certain that she knew she would be well paid. My emotional control evaporated, letting loose a flood of tears. She responded that she would be willing, but must ask her husband. Adding that her mother-in-law lived with them, she assured me that the woman had no say in the matter – indicating that she was not overly fond of the woman. For my part, I was a little concerned about how the mother-in-law would treat Alex – but I had no choice.

I was pleased with the responses I had gotten so far. She then told me that they lived in the center of town where it was not heavily populated. The house has a large balcony where Alex and her daughter could play unseen from the street. As I finished my work I asked her what she thought her husband would want in exchange for hiding Alex. She said that she didn't know.

Giving me cake and coffee she packed some treats for Alex even though it was forbidden. I mentioned that I had some money and a nice gold watch and thanked her for everything. She looked at me with compassion and assured me that her husband would probably agree. Feeling fortunate in finding Lucy I grew impatient to get home to tell Pina. Waiting for the brigade to leave seemed like an eternity. Yet deep in my heart I was afraid to rejoice. I had to hide my feelings from the rest of the brigade. Arriving at the ghetto gates we found that they were not "clean" today. There stood SS officers with skulls on their hats but Gecke and Keitel were not to be seen.

Hershel's wife greeted me at home. She informed me that he had escaped with a friend from his work brigade. They swam across the great Neman River eluding German bullets by swimming underwater. At least he was free to join the Russian underground while we still felt cut off from the rest of the world.

Overcome by sadness I thought out loud, "Who knows if I will ever see him again in my lifetime?" At least he was better off than we were. We could never mention his escape for fear that the news would reach the Gestapo. Then I informed everyone that I would know for certain by tomorrow about a place for Alex after confirmation by Lucy's husband. Everyone was pleased at this news. Meanwhile, I invited Chena to stay with us.

During another long sleepless night for both Pina and myself I could see that he was deep in thought. Wandering quietly around the house to gather up everything I slipped out of the house at 5:00 a.m.

As our brigade approached the work site I spotted my gypsy friend carrying a package. It turned out to be some fish that her husband had caught that they wanted us to have. I was deeply moved by the fact that there were still people in this world who cared. I thanked her for her warm friendship promising I would never forget her and her husband. Asking me if I needed any medicines she promised to bring them on her next visit.

I also found two salamis in the package, which I deposited in Lucy's room. I was concerned that the usually punctual Lucy was late this morning – doubts starting to circulate in my mind. Suddenly, Lucy entered the room with a cheerful “Good Morning.” While I presented a calm exterior my heart beat like a drum. Noticing that she was extremely friendly this morning, I sensed that she would blurt out the good news at any moment.

All of a sudden she informed me that her husband had agreed to hide Alex. Genuinely happy about this she promised that she would look after him as if he were her own child. Even her daughter said she was happy to have a little brother. She gave me one instruction: to tell Alex that if her daughter asked him who he was he was to say he was her aunt's son. She also told her daughter that Alex speaks German because his father is German.

I asked about her mother-in-law's opinion and she said that the woman doesn't interfere because she is an old-fashioned woman. While this troubled me the precariousness of life in the ghetto forced me to accept the situation. Going to Lucy's bed I removed the money and gold that I had hidden under the mattress and gave it to her. She looked quite pleased.

We then made plans for Alex's transfer. She said she would be at the gate that evening and that I must see to it that all ran smoothly. She told me that the previous night she and her husband had inspected the ghetto fence to find an area for retrieving the child. They chose the cemetery for the place of the exchange.

I could not get Alex to her fast enough. The rumors of another roundup became ever shriller. Terror enveloped us day and night like it had never done before. When we left the ghetto in the morning we never knew if there would be someone to welcome us in the evening. Feeling this terror I could not get home fast enough to tell everyone. Today my tears were tears of joy. Trying to be patient I drank one cup of coffee after another.

By the time everybody was ready to go home I realized that I had been so busy crying that I had forgotten to eat lunch. I had spent the time with Lucy telling her what kind of child Alex was and how to deal with him. The ride back seemed an eternity but I finally got home – this time with no food because I was so distracted.

When Alex greeted me at the door, he asked me if I was tired, and I answered that I wasn't – even though I was exhausted. I then told him that Lucy would take him and that he would have a

little girl his age to play with. He started to cry saying, “You will take me out again, they will take your money again, and they will send me back again.” I assured him he would be safe until the Russians marched into Kovno.

I asked Shayna for something to eat and she brought me a hot bowl of soup and a hamburger. Sitting in my lap while I ate Alex suddenly jumped up and ran to his father, exclaiming that he was not going to this new place. Pina lifted him onto his lap and assured him that this was the best place for him to be and that we would be reunited some day. Alex made certain to ask if Shayna would be with us on that day.

With time fleeting I gathered Alex’s belongings and a sweet-smelling soap he liked very much and packed everything in a parcel. As we set off for the gate Shayna held Alex’s hand as we followed. Alex told Shayna not to forget to come to take him home. Arriving near the gate we entered the nearby house of a friend. From there, I kept a lookout for the sight of Lucy, while Alex tearfully protested that he would not leave the house. When Pina gave the usual assurances Alex looked skeptical.

I then whisked everyone out of the house while Pina repeatedly assured Alex that the Russians were getting ever closer to rescuing us. Alex’s blue eyes were pools of hope mixed with tears as they remained glued to his father. With 7:00 p.m. nearing I spotted Lucy wandering around the cemetery. I took Alex and his package to the gate, quickly handed them over to Lucy, and ran back to the house. I watched through the window to see if Alex would look back at me but he didn’t even turn around. He walked away holding onto Lucy’s hand. I entered the house with a smiling face and a broken heart.

I comforted Pina as he lost his composure and sobbed uncontrollably. I told him that we must now attempt to escape the ghetto and save ourselves. Thanking our hosts we headed for our home. We were deliberately silent to keep potentially envious ears from hearing of Alex’s safety. Pina’s head was hung low, his eyes piercing the ground while Shayna sighed continuously.

At home, again in a house that cried for Alex, we dropped from exhaustion. I asked myself endless questions about how Alex was doing all night long. Finally falling into a deep sleep I was awakened by Shayna. Quickly getting dressed I ran to the gate wondering what news Yankl had about the Russians. He always heard the news from the Germans at the gates and passed it

on to his friends. At 6:00 a.m., he passed our brigade through. At the first opportunity, Lucy informed me that Alex had had a very good night and that everybody including her mother-in-law liked him.

With this news my mood quickly improved. When I asked her how her husband liked the gold watch she answered that he would also like a few thousand German marks and a large man's suit. Looking me straight in the eye she kept asking if I believed what she was telling me about Alex. I promised her that I would fill her request by the following day keeping in mind the increasing urgency in the ghetto. She left the room and each time she returned she would reassure me that she would save Alex. The day went swiftly because of the good news about Alex. Sitting on a stool I dozed off and slept until it was time for me to go home. I asked Lucy to give Alex a kiss from all of us.

As we approached the ghetto gates we noticed that many brigades were lined up waiting to pass through. Getting closer we saw Gecke and shivered. Nobody was bringing anything in but we still feared The Skull – a sadist who often beat his victims for no reason. As we approached, however, Gecke quickly passed us through. We ran as fast as we could.

With Pina waiting for me I shouted that Alex was saved. I filled him in on everything that Lucy told me. Then I told him that Gecke was at the gate confiscating parcels and food from the brigades. I asked Pina to find a large suit for Lucy's husband. Shayna told him that Motel's brigade had much clothing that had belonged to murdered German Jews. Pina went right over to Motel and bought a suit as well as a jacket. Packing everything I also got a few thousand German marks ready. I hoped that Lucy's husband would not desire anything more.

The talk of escaping now preoccupied me. Since we had lost contact with our Lithuanian major friend we could not tell him that Alex was safe so that we could hide with him. We had to remain in the ghetto with the others.

In the morning I arrived at the men's brigade. One man wore the suit and another wore the jacket under his own clothing. When we arrived at the work site I gave the clothing and German marks to Lucy who was very pleased. I felt looking at her, however, that she wanted to save Alex for humanitarian not material reasons. In her room she told me that Alex felt comfortable as if he had been born into her family.

She told me that with the short haircut she gave him he didn't look Jewish. Not wanting to hurt my feelings she said that short hair suited him. I mentioned the medallion hanging from around his neck. I also stated that after the Russians liberated Kovno the Jews would return from their hiding places in the woods and would probably establish headquarters in a synagogue. I instructed her that if neither my husband nor I returned she could take Alex to the community committee. I also mentioned that my brother, who had escaped, would also come to look for him.

Listening to all this Lucy started to cry. She felt sympathy for us at our saying good-bye to Alex, not knowing if we would ever see him again. We both cried and embraced and kissing her I asked her to relay the kiss to Alex from his father and mother. She solemnly promised that she would. With that, she went to the kitchen and brought me a cup of coffee. She asked me why Alex lies quietly deep in thought. I told her that he was more aware of what was going on than most children, and that being a very serious child I added, he also seemed very much aware when he was in the ghetto.

The tension in the ghetto had become thick. I was overjoyed to hear that Monia had found a place for her child. When she expressed doubt that this would be the last hiding place I assured her that the Russians were very close. She was not aware of how I knew this so I confided that Pina worked with the underground and was privy to the facts. The question of escape became more and more problematic. The Nazis doubled the guards at the ghetto gates as many Jews had escaped during the night. I didn't have time to look for a place for us busy as I was with trying to save Alex. We were troubled by uncertainty. Now, when it was time to go home from work, the guard rather than the brigade leader took us. When we asked him if something had happened in the ghetto he didn't answer. There were too many bad signs and we felt numb.

The ride back to the ghetto seemed to take forever. The women with small children in the ghetto began to cry. Yet we passed through the gates without trouble.

As I entered the house Pina and Shayna were waiting for me looking very troubled. Pina immediately told me that the ghetto had been ordered closed tomorrow and that we could not go to work. Travel in or out of the ghetto had been forbidden. With no place to hide we did not get excited about even trying to escape. At least Alex had been saved.

Now we could think only of the Russian liberators. We imagined them to be the same ones who occupied Kovno in 1940 and who treated us well. As we sat figuring where to hide, the ghetto workhouse and our bunker came to minds but neither place would be secure in the event of a giant roundup. I made some coffee and something to eat. However, nobody felt like eating preferring just to sip coffee. I kept on talking about Alex, telling Pina and Shayna that Lucy said he was happy, played well, listened well – and that she was happy with him. We were all relieved.

CHAPTER 6

I suddenly got up and started toward the gate. Perhaps, I wondered, if I bribed the guard he would let us out. But if he did, where would we go? Shayna could leave the ghetto any time because she looks and speaks like a Lithuanian. But where could Pina and I go?

There was nobody outside but the Jewish ghetto police. There weren't even any Germans and I thought that this was a false alarm – not the first time that had happened. At the gates I found two guards at every corner. I realized that the same guard who let Alex pass could not do that now out of fear of the other guard. I kept hoping that he would glance at me but he deliberately turned his head away.

I could see that there was no point in hanging around here any longer. I must go home and work with Pina at finding a safe place. I ran home in the deathly quiet – so quiet that it was terrifying. I ran as fast as I could. I arrived home out of breath.

At home Shayna retold the story of the great roundup and her good fortune of escaping death. For that reason, she has chosen to take her chances again and leave the ghetto. She said she would walk to her birthplace, Vilkamir. She took some bread, some sugar, and some clothes and she said her good-byes. She would walk as far as her feet could carry her. She promised that if she survived and we didn't she would come and get Alex and raise him as her very own child. My sister-in-law came in to say good-bye to Shayna. She told her that if she should find Hershel she should give him news of everyone and tell him that Alex was safely hidden. We all cried as we said good-bye and Shayna began her walk to freedom.

Broken-hearted at Shayna's departure we had to turn our attention to saving ourselves. When we asked Chena to come with us to hide in the workhouse attic, she refused, preferring to remain in her own house. Taking some bread and several bottles of water we left. The sun baking on the roof made the attic oppressively hot and I had all I could do to wait until nightfall – when the Nazis would have left for the day. But Pina then said we had to wait until morning to see what it would bring.

The morning brought nothing good. Through the small attic windows we witnessed the Nazis dragging children into the trucks to satisfy their lust for eliminating every last innocent child

from the ghetto. We heard the murderous cries of “Juden roust” (“Jews out”) as they threw young children and old people into the trucks with the music blaring. The cries of parents were even louder than the music. Yet nobody heard, nobody helped and nobody stopped the Germans.

We watched the Nazis leave this area and proceed further into the ghetto. I begged Pina to leave the attic with me now. He saw how I was suffering – not only from the heat but also from witnessing our people being dragged to their deaths. Seeing the helpless parents traumatized by having their young wrenched from them and thrown into trucks like garbage was too much for me. I had to leave this place. As the Nazis were taking only the very young and the very old it seemed reasonable to go home.

As we walked home I asked Pina to check our neighbor’s house to see if their children were safe. He assured me that they were safely hidden away in our bunker. We were anxious to know what was happening in the ghetto but going to the gate right now was extremely risky. Instead, we went to the house that the Jewish committee used.

As we approached the house we noticed that a large sign had been posted on the building. Written in German, it said: “The Jews of the ghetto must now gather in the large square tomorrow morning at 6:00 a.m. No one can remain in their homes. There will be no exceptions.” Our hearts beat like drums for we knew what was in store. Pina and I just looked at each other in silence passing between us. Tomorrow, the ghetto would be liquidated.

My first words were that I would not go into the bunker. My fate would be the same as everyone else’s. It was obvious that the Jewish committee would have no answers for us and would know no more than we knew. The committee merely instructed all Jews to go back to their homes and not hang around in small groups. Broken-hearted we all went home telling each other that the murderers would once again put on a good show for us tomorrow.

Crying continuously I told Pina that Alex won’t even know what happened to us. Our only hope was that Hershel would survive and come back to get Alex when the situation permitted. Pina tried to assure me that the Jews returning from Russia would form a committee and that Lucy would contact them. Then he added that the underground would return and free all those Jews hiding in bunkers and in the forests.

As we talked at home the Markovshi sisters and their husbands came in and asked if they could hide in our bunkers. We naturally consented and led them to it. I gave them my summer clothing and some food as we would not be able to take anything. I did not want anyone to know that anybody was hiding in the bunker as nobody could be trusted.

The morning of July 12, 1944 arrived fiery, hot and oppressive. Dressing in our lightest clothing and carrying a sweater we went to the large square as instructed. Chena came with us. We found many men, women and children already assembled. As we watched, the Nazis searched all the houses then set them afire. As the houses burned, people hiding in the bunkers under the houses ran out, their bodies aflame.

Seeing this set me to worrying about Alex who was in much less peril than we were. I told Pina of my fear that Lucy's mother-in-law might tell Alex that the ghetto was on fire and that they were burning Jews in the ghetto. Although he assured me that she could not be so cruel I found it hard to believe him. That was just one more way in which I felt totally powerless. Despite all his assurances I had lost hope of our family every being reunited.

Our chances of survival seemed slim. Our murderers had everything worked out systematically to the last detail. We knew that we were destined for the gas chambers and ovens in Germany. Despite the increasing volume of the cries of our people we were totally alone. The answer of the civilized world was utter silence. From the multitude kneeling on the ground came the Question, as if in one voice, "God, why have you forsaken us?"

Flaming bodies continued to run from the funeral pyres that were our homes. Booted gangsters carried burned bodies of children from the bunkers throwing them into a pile. They didn't even allow us to help the burned Jews who carried dead children. This torment raged on before our eyes without end.

For hours the sun beat down on us unmercifully and we were without benefit even of food or drink. Old people kept falling like flies. When we asked how much longer we had to wait we were answered with orders to be silent.

A young SS man ran into all the bunkers looking for Jews. When he found one, he shot him on the spot, not bothering to bring him out to join the rest of us. At one point a German soldier who used to take us to work passed by. When I asked him where they were taking us he answered

quickly, “To the train. Cattle cars are ready and waiting to take you to Germany.” And he quickly disappeared.

After what seemed like several hours he reappeared. We promised him gold, jewelry and money if he would help us jump off the train before it reached the German border. He told us to board the car that he would be guarding. We trusted him thinking perhaps he is half Jewish. He used to be very kind to us when he escorted us to work and he had looked the other way when we traded. His behavior had been in stark contrast to that of other Germans.

As night approached there was still no indication of our leaving the ghetto. The cries of the old and of the children with running noses, sunburned lips and empty bellies were heartbreaking. The stench become unbearable as people were forced to soil their clothes for lack of toilets. All the waiting gave us time to worry about who would take care of Alex after we were gone. We came to learn that those who had tried to escape through the gates had been shot.

One such victim was our friend Abrasha Swersky who had always hoped to join his sister in Israel. In one move he would escape both the Diaspora and the Nazis. But that dream had been dashed for him and for countless others. We lost hope and with it, the will to live.

With hearts of stone, the sadistic Nazis watched children die of hunger in their mothers’ arms pretending not to notice. So these are the Aryans, the supermen, and the self-elected elite of the human race. It is mind-boggling to think how white-gloved, monocled, egotistical murderers can be superior to anybody.

Suddenly the loudspeaker announced that everybody must stand up and line up in groups of four. I held Chena’s hand to insure that she was in my group. It took time to accomplish this since nobody wanted to break up their families. I remember the time: 8:00 p.m.

We started marching toward the Aleksoter bridge where the trains waited to take us to Germany, and death. We kept hoping that we would find the car with the kind German soldier. As we marched closer Chena jumped into a deep ditch. We thought we would never see her again but we were relieved to realize that Aleksot, her birthplace, was at least a town she knew. I told Pina that she would probably be saved by one of her neighbors. Now there were just the two of us.

As we marched, we were unable to look at the Lithuanians who lined up and watched in joy. Seeing us being taken to Germany they were happy that the last witnesses to their collaboration with the Nazis would be gone. Even now, as Jews tried to run away from the column of marchers, Lithuanians pointed them out to the Nazis who then beat them or forced them back into line. To run now would be like going from the frying pan into the fire.

When we arrived at the train, we stood for another hour, amid a sea of crying children and women screaming and tearing at their hair. Even the men were moved to tears by the fears and cries of the women and children. We no longer asked where the civilized world was while this was going on. Now we asked where our fellow Jews were.

Suddenly spotting our kind German guard I asked him to come to our car and he nodded that he would. The train was made up of open cattle cars for the people and closed cars for the horses. It was time to board and we entered a car that had other mothers and children. We each got a loaf of bread but there was little water and that was saved for the children. Butter from the ghetto was also distributed. Not knowing how long the ride would last we tried to conserve our bread.

Witnessing the suffering of the children was heartbreaking. Those of us without our children felt it was better to die now than to go to that God-forsaken country, Germany. We could hear them closing the doors to the cars. At the last moment, just before our door was closed, our soldier jumped into our car and locked the door from the inside. With thoughts of escape we again asked him if he would allow us to jump off the train before we reached the German border. He answered quickly – perhaps too quickly, “Yes, you will all be able to jump off the train.”

We gave the soldier whatever money, gold and jewelry we had managed to take with us. He instructed us to jump one at a time and then immediately run and hide in the tall weeds. The train whistle blew and the soldier announced that we were on our way.

Pina and his friends immediately got busy poking holes in the car walls with knives so that we could see out. The women were suspicious of the soldier and engaged him in conversation in order to distract him.

Pina instructed us to wait for the grain fields near the German border repeating what the soldier said about how to jump. We feared that the train would stop and the Germans would see the holes we had made.

The soldier rocked back and forth with the motion of the train almost hypnotically. The women, continuing to engage him in conversation, kept giving him watches and other things just so he won't notice the holes.

Traveling for some period of time, I urged Pina that we should jump off now and save ourselves but he said we should wait until the others jumped. Despite my continued pleading we stood and watched others leave. The questions that the women ply the soldier with were almost drowned out by the loud clacking of the wheels.

Each time someone jumped we rejoiced but also did not know what awaited them. Quietly walking among the people I encouraged them to jump. As I wondered out loud if there would even be wheat fields left for us Pina promised that we would jump at the next field. I still wanted to jump now but Pina still held out.

The train began to slow down and finally stopped. We feared that the Germans would see the holes or notice how many people were missing so the men threw away their knives to dispose of the evidence of their activity. Thankfully, the patrols passed our car without even noticing and the whistle blew once again. Even our soldier, who had not rejoined us, hadn't noticed that people were missing. The men hid the holes with their bodies.

Still far from the border many who could have saved themselves did not do so, for we had already lost the will. Numb like zombies we could still rejoice over the others' escape by singing Hatikvah. Pina and I kept asking ourselves why we didn't jump but now he was afraid to do so. He asked the soldier exactly how far it was to the German border. Taking out a map to study the soldier announced, "one hour." Despite hearing that nobody bothered to jump anymore.

We still worried that he would notice how many people were missing. He was so fascinated with what we gave him, however, that he was distracted. Meanwhile one of the women changed into men's clothing and a man's hat. Pina rejected my wish to do the same thing for fear that I would be caught and put to death. The train crossed into Germany. The air was hot and stuffy and we were parched with thirst and found it difficult to breathe. We stop at a railway station in a small town. A group of young boys in Hitler Youth uniforms stand in the station holding pails of water. When we plead for water they hurl the water at us – it is boiling hot. As they scalded us they screamed, "Jewish pigs, cursed Jews."

The train moves on stopping again in Tigenhoff. Here, the men are told to get off while the women are told to remain. The woman disguised as a man gets off as well. Saying tearful good-byes the men kiss their children and wives. The Germans impatient yell, “Faster, faster. Get to the other track where a train is ready and waiting for you.” Dr. Elkas, head of the Jewish ghetto committee asks a Nazi officer where they are taking the men. The Nazi, raising his cocked hand high, slaps Dr. Elkas across the face.

That gesture, at that moment, explained our fate to us only too clearly. In marked contrast to how we felt the residents of Tigenhoff watched gleefully through their windows. Two of the housewives from the so-called elite Aryan race spotted two escaped women hiding under logs and promptly reported them to the Nazis. They watched with joy and self-satisfaction as the two women were pulled screaming from their hiding place, brutally beaten and thrown back onto the train.

The “train with the women and children sped past the train carrying the men. We saw their tears and heard them cry, “Shalom” fleetingly and then they were lost from our sight forever. Many women wanted to throw themselves to their deaths from the speeding train but others convinced them not to. My heart still beat with hope because I wanted to live for my child’s sake. I didn’t want him to be raised by strangers or to go through life without ever seeing me again.

Night approached and we were hungry and tired. We asked the soldier where they took the men and he answered, “To Dachau.” – a chilling answer that took our breath away. A hush fell over us now, clinging to us. We knew enough of that place. Sensing our despondency the soldier tried to soften his answer by adding that the men would be put to work. He also said that we would be going to a concentration camp to work.

The train came to a stop. The murderous Nazis, the self-proclaimed elite, had carried out their plan.

CHAPTER 7

The gate to the concentration camp was near a large wood. Seeing this we all started to cry believing we would all be shot in the woods. Sitting down next to the train we were exhausted, hungry and thirsty. We begged unsuccessfully for food and water and then decided to give what food remained to the children.

After a short pause we were told to stand, line up in fours and march deeper into the woods. There we saw a number of small buildings and a large brick building beside a small lake containing swans. A group of SS officers separated us into groups, each of which was assigned to a numbered barracks. Mothers with young children were sent to a separate barracks – everyone knew why, without saying.

The toilets in the barracks didn't work and we were forced to use the sand in the distance. The bunks consisted of bare wood but we didn't get a chance to rest there long. We were led into another barracks where they took our personal belongings from us. They cut our hair and gave us long shirts with a number on the sleeves. Two Polish prisoners stood watch as two SS officers stuck their fingers into every orifice of our bodies searching for diamonds and gold.

The number on my sleeve – 33707 – will remain in my memory until the day I die. The sleeve had a black triangle on it under which was a red stripe – with the number under it. The shirt was so rough that it could have been made of thin sheets of wood. It felt like needles on our skin. We later found out what the black triangle and red stripe signified: condemned to death, communist.

We no longer looked like human beings and we lost all dignity, all hope. At last, we went back to our barracks lying down on the hard planks exhausted, hungry, thirsty, and forlorn. We lay there like corpses the whole night. Arising early in the morning, we looked into each other's vacant eyes. An old Russian woman prisoner ordered us to go into the yard to receive coffee. Drinking it quickly we hoped to get more as we were starved and parched.

After the coffee we were each handed a small dirty, rusty metal bowl. As it was presumably to be used for eating, the sight of it turned our stomachs. As it later turned out, we were to use these not only for eating, but to wash our hair and our hands in, and even for a toilet. We came to be

grateful for having any such utensil at all. We were given bars of soap, which we later learned were made from human fat.

With our hair short and our long shirts we were a pitiful group with no will to live. We thought we must be in the hands of the devil. At suppertime we went back out to a huge vacuum tub of hot water with a few cabbage leaves with no salt for each of us. Back in the barracks our bodily orifices were again searched. The two Polish women still hoped to find some gold or diamonds. They not only pulled the gold caps right off our teeth but also broke gold teeth right out of our mouths.

We were outside talking one day when we heard a soldier in the guard tower singing a Russian song, “Oh mamma, why was I born?” This made us cry, some of us even fainted because it reminded us of the outside world. We thought once again of how nobody came to our aid, how we were left to our murderous captors.

Holding Alex’s picture, which I had hidden in the sand, I felt bitter tears falling endlessly from my eyes. I imagined that I could hear his voice softly saying from afar, “Mamma, don’t cry, you’ll see me again.” His words gave me renewed hope and I really believed that my son had talked to me.

One day a truck arrived carrying clothing for one hundred women who were being sent to Dachau. Unfortunately, it was for a group of Hungarian women and not for our group. We Lithuanian women, aged twenty to twenty-five, were taken to the fields of German farms to harvest vegetables. We were given cloth shoes with wooden soles, fed coffee and bread and told to wait until the farmers came to get us. I marveled at the efficiency with which these Germans killed their victims – getting the last ounce of labor out of them before they dropped.

The German farmers arrived dressed in their green felt hats with a brush in the hatband and wearing leather pants. We had never seen anyone dressed like that before. Each farmer approached us and picked his slave laborers – some taking fifteen, some ten, some fewer. We climbed into the wagons finding that we had to straddle chunks of wood as there was no place to sit and nothing to hold on to. The farmer, of course, had a good padded seat.

We traveled for six hours on roads so bad that our buttocks were swollen for weeks. Only our youth enabled us to survive this ordeal. Every time the wheels went over one of the all-too-

numerous big rocks we would be thrown up into the air and then fall back. By the time we arrived at our farm we were so bruised that we were barely able to get down.

Each farmer took his selected slaves to his respective farm. The group of thirteen to which I belonged was taken to a blacksmith's shop with a coal stove and straw all over the ground – our home. The farmer entered lecturing us that we must do everything that we were told. "If you do not obey you will be sent back to the concentration camp and you know what's waiting for you there – the gas chambers and the crematorium." Breaking out in a cold sweat we knew full well that he meant what he said. We now had a grim purpose in life – to work to stay alive so that we could outlive him.

The first few days on the farm were quite memorable. We were given two harnessed oxen. Looking at them with the foolish expression in their eyes as they looked at me I became frightened. As I tried to drag them one way, they tried to drag me another way. When the farmer saw that I could not control them he sent me to the barns to thrash various seeds.

The first seeds we thrashed were carrot seeds. This activity created such a thick dust that we could not even see someone standing next to us. In addition, our eyes became so irritated that the next day they were so swollen that we were barely able to see anything at all. The Ukrainian, Polish and Russian prisoners were given protective goggles but the Jewish prisoners were given nothing.

Despite all this we did everything we were told. Although we searched for ways to make our work easier we could find none. We worked very hard. We had never done fieldwork before as most of us had spent our years at the university. Knowing this the farmer always found the hardest work for us to do but we didn't dare complain. This was an utter turn-around in our lives, with changes in every regard.

In a rare free moment we would talk about our children. One common bond was that many of us had given our children away to strangers to hide. Despite our fears and frequent mood changes our hope of finding our husbands and children kept us going. It was clear that without faith we had nothing. Our free time for talking after lunch was short for we had to go back to the fields.

The foreman, who had come to Germany from Poland, sent us to the field to gather the radish tops. He told us, my friend and me, to bring the pitchforks from the barn where the cows are kept

– a great distance from the radish field. Going back and forth five times we still had failed to find the kind he wanted. On the sixth trip we asked an English prisoner milking a cow what kind of forks to get and he showed us. A Hitler Youth, standing in the field, proceeded to yell at us to load the radishes on the wagons faster, swearing and calling us lazy, rotten Jews.

The next day as we were walking to the field that same youth riding a four-horse wagon managed to run over me and break two of my ribs. Fortunately, the wagon was empty or he could have inflicted worse damage. As it was the pain was excruciating and my screams could have awakened the dead. The girls carried me back to the blacksmith's shop and bound my ribs with straw – the only thing they had – and went back to work. I spent three days by myself and waited for them to bring me food from the kitchen.

The English and Scottish prisoners lived in the farmyard and were free to roam in the village. At night, they would climb on the roof of the blacksmith's shop and through the chimney drop coal for our stove, medicines and dry bread. They also shared their Red Cross packages with us.

Even the old German lady who was the caretaker's wife gave us little packages of mended stockings, onions, salt and sugar. All of these things were very helpful to us. When the fall season arrived, cold and wet, those stockings the German lady supplied helped a great deal.

We would have a supper consisting of a dairy soup in the kitchen at eight o'clock in the evening. On Sundays we got soup with some blood sausage. We would also sneak some vegetables from the fields such as carrots, beets, peas and a few potatoes. At least I had some sustenance during my infirmity.

On the third day that I was in bed the farmer came in and said, "If you don't get up and go back to work I will send you back to the concentration camp." He radiated arrogance and a feeling that he ruled the world – as if we were puppets on his string. I could only look at him vacantly thinking to myself that it didn't matter anymore. Then when he left I began to cry and to tremble. Since this is Saturday at least I won't have to work tomorrow anyway I thought.

When the girls came back with my supper they told me that the Red Cross had come to visit the prisoners but not the Jewish prisoners. They ignored the Jews on the other farms as well. I vowed to tell the world about the Red Cross if I survived. Seeing them through the window, walking

arm-banded with the farmer, we banged audibly but they didn't even turn their heads. Once again, we were being ignored by the free world.

Monday morning I joined the others in the field to gather the remaining seeds. Like needles they pierced our shoes and our feet bloodied the fields. We were often so tired after a day's work that we couldn't find the strength for supper. After washing, we fell asleep on our worm-infested straws.

We entertained ourselves by singing. The two Shapiro sisters from Kovno had beautiful voices and often sang for us as we recited the partizaller, "Don't say that this is our last journey," and other Jewish and Hebrew songs.

Not everybody in our group managed to survive the rigors of the Nazi farm. One very young girl, who had married a friend of Pina's a few days before the war broke out, was a very nervous person. She was so lonesome for her new husband that she cried constantly. One day she and I were instructed to gather the radish tops as they were cut and to place them in piles. Unable to keep up with the cutting machine we became covered with radish tops. Hearing the other girls quitting for the day we crawled out to follow them.

Seeing this, the foreman would not permit us to leave and ordered us to finish our work even if it took all night. While I took this command in stride the girl began to weep uncontrollably. I worked all night with her meanwhile trying to exhort her to have courage. Her eyes became glazed and it became obvious to me that she was having a nervous collapse. When the other girls returned in the morning they tried to speak to her but without success. She was speechless and unaware of her surroundings. The German farmer took her away and we were never to see her again. That farmer was already keeping his eye on me with my broken ribs. I knew that I had no alternative but to work as hard as I could. Otherwise the same fate would befall me as had seized the poor young girl.

With the arrival of the rainy season our shoes started to fall apart on us. As we tried to pick potatoes in the deep mud our feet were sucked down so strongly that it took all our strength to lift them out. A few hours of this routine caused the wooden soles to tear away from the shoe tops. Though we improvised with straw to keep the shoes together, even this device ultimately failed, as the straw inevitably became wet as well.

Cold and wet we continued to pick the potatoes to the command of “Faster, faster!” Following two Germans who rode the tractor we had to sack the potatoes and load them on the wagon as fast as the tractor unearthed them. Even our youth did not come to our aid when we tried to straighten up our backs after twelve hours of this grueling labor. I can still feel how my back was stooped into a seemingly permanent crescent.

We would then follow the loaded wagons to the storage field where we had to unload the potatoes into two adjacent pits – the larger ones in one pit and the smaller in the other. The rotten potatoes were thrown back into the sacks. We were so weak and tired by this time that even the thought of going back to the concentration camp seemed appealing by comparison. Even the food that we received was not compensation enough for the harshness of this existence.

We survived by living as a family sharing both the good and the bad. One day we spotted a small apple tree on the way to the field. We quickly picked the little red apples and hid them under our shirts baking them later at the blacksmith’s shop.

On one bitterly cold December day the farmer told us that we had finished his seasonal work and that he was taking us back to the concentration camp. We asked him if he could at least report that we had done good work for him but he said nothing.

The next morning he gave each of us a loaf of bread and a piece of liverwurst. For five long, bitter hours, we rode back to the camp on wagons with chunks of wood and no handrails once again. There was no water to soothe our savage thirst.

As we approached the camp it looked exactly the same as it had before. We went right to our barracks and lay down on the wooden bunks. We were instantly invaded by large lice, followed by a typhoid epidemic that spared nobody. Four women lay in bunks made for one, head to feet.

The typhoid weakened us all and I felt I was on the verge of emotional collapse. Every unintended touch of a woman’s foot brought excruciating pain. When a woman above my bunk began to talk about her son Alex I jumped to the floor yelling, “Alex my child, come to me, I see you.”

Suddenly the fever broke and I felt reborn. With each day I became stronger in body and mind increasingly aware of who and where I was. I kept telling everyone that my Alex was not far

from here and that one day soon he would come to take me home. It was typical for people to fantasize here and to verbalize openly about whatever entered their minds.

Life was truly harsh with no respite in sight. Our stomachs were swollen with hunger and pain. Those on the bottom bunks inspected the other bunks on hands and knees finding many dead occupants. Some corpses had been lifeless for several days and were covered with lice. The sight sent us into such despair that all we could do was to return to our own lice-infested bunks.

Some Polish girls came to remove the dead bodies from the bunks. Starting with the lower bunks they put a tag on the wrists bearing the concentration camp number. Then they went to the second and third tiers throwing bodies to the floor like so many sacks.

My fever had returned and again I hallucinated about Alex. Suddenly I became aware of the Polish girl trying to throw me off the bunk, she obviously thinking I was dead. Seeing me open my eyes they started to laugh and walked away.

At least my delirium provided me with a vehicle of hope that we would outlive the Nazis and become reunited with our families. But when I had regained my senses, I had little hope of finding Pina alive since the men probably had to work even harder than we did. Knowing Pina's sensitivity over the suffering of others I felt that his spirit would be broken. I had such a strong premonition about this that I did not even allow myself to entertain any hope.

The black, bitter days and nights dragged on and on. Suddenly, we heard that the French were drawing near and we were going to be moved from the concentration camp. This made us wonder where our next destination was to be but our question was never answered.

CHAPTER 8

After a few days we were abruptly ordered out of our barracks. We were transported to an ocean port where we boarded ships like cattle. For two days we were not given any food or water.

Aboard the ship there was a clear demarcation among the prisoners. Jewish prisoners were held in the hold while all other nationalities stayed on the main deck. They had plenty of fresh air to breathe while we nearly suffocated. We managed to find some raw potatoes and raw barley lying around. The SS gave us only pieces of bread.

Our ship passed right through the middle of a naval battle near the town of Pelo. On the ninth day, as we approached Sherbruk, Royal Air Force planes flew over us. Taking us for a Nazi warship they bombed us causing the oil tank to catch fire and setting the ship aflame. Panic spread as rapidly as the fire. The Germans removed the grids over the holds to save their food and in the confusion we spilled out on deck.

We could see the captain, an SS officer, using Morse signals to confer with a ship anchored some distance from us. Understanding Morse Code I knew that he was asking the other ship to rescue us. The officers responded that they were willing, provided we brought our ship alongside theirs. Some women, panicking, jumped overboard and drowned. The Germans were throwing salted herrings from the refrigerators. Ignoring the flames we grabbed the herrings devouring the entire fish, head and all.

As the ship's motors propelled us to that other ship, on the first day of 1945, other ships passed us flying white flags instead of swastikas. Before I could even interpret the meaning of the flags the bullhorns from those ships announced that Hitler was dead and that Germany had capitulated. The SS guards hearing this escaped in a small submarine moored to the ship. The captain, meanwhile, managed to navigate the ship, still flying the swastika, safely to the other ship. Only when we boarded the second ship did we know for sure that we had been rescued from our Nazi oppressors. We were fed at once while we searched in vain for people we knew in the passing ships with white flags. Eighty prisoners remained with the captain of the burning ship as it sailed away.

We later learned that a Count living in a castle near the coast had rescued those remaining prisoners. Some children playing on the shore saw the burning ship. When they heard the screams of the people begging to be rescued they ran to the castle to inform the Count. He immediately sent his servants out in small boats to get them.

For the first time in months we were allowed to bathe. It had been so many months since our bodies were in contact with water that we felt as if we were in paradise. We spent the entire night awake, eating and singing. Our first song was “Hatikva,” to signify the faith and hope that had brought us to our rescue.

The next morning we were transferred to a ship that took us to Kiel. We were now free of the fear of death, the memories of the SS officers with their stern, arrogant faces that followed our every step, strangely distant from our present freedom. Still, we were not totally free for we could not move about unguarded – but we were no longer in hell.

The ocean was filled to the horizon with ships flying white flags signifying that the SS had surrendered to the regular German military. Approaching Kiel from afar we could see the town had been completely destroyed by bombs. This made us feel that the world was not ours. As we disembarked at Kiel Germans lined us up four abreast and led us into town. Those of us who had been wounded by the British bombing of the ships were taken by ambulance to hospitals. People spilled out of their houses looking incredulous that there were Jews who still survived. The Germans who escorted us, civilian police, wore white armbands not swastikas. They told us not to worry and that we would soon be given shelter.

We entered a bombed out restaurant, with tables set with dry white bread. As we sat down German women obviously trying to appease their guilty consciences served us hot soup and corned beef. Other German women stood outside the restaurant’s broken windows with small parcels. Fearful that they might contain poisoned food nobody went to take them. These women kept staring at us living skeletons, bags of skin and bones barely alive. Telling ourselves that the Germans had reduced us to this state, we vowed solemnly to restore the flesh to our bodies, so that we could outlive our former captors. Our youth was to our advantage.

While eating I noticed stacks of plates and many sacks on the balcony above us. Not too weak to look for more food we went upstairs to find onions in the sacks. Emptying onions, potatoes and

eating utensils from the sacks we loaded these into our own sacks. We found a freezer full of butter, putting that into our sacks as well. As we went downstairs with full sacks others went upstairs to help themselves.

Accustomed as we were to concentration camp life our fear of going hungry tomorrow clung to us. The temptation was to gorge ourselves, which the doctors among us feared would be harmful. They forbade us to eat further.

After resting for several hours we were led back to the ship, which was named after Adolph Hitler. One civilian policeman told us we were being taken to Sweden while another later said we were being taken to a camp with other nationalities. Once aboard we found a large theater with binoculars on each of the seats, which were covered with leather. Enraged over what we had been subjected to – not to mention being on board a ship named for our archenemy – we slashed the leather seats systematically destroying the theater and took the binoculars.

We disembarked at a town near the Kiel Channel and proceeded to walk a few hours until we reached the camp. Arriving in the middle of the night we found people there of every nationality. We were frightened when we encountered little people with small eyes dressed in white shirts and carrying lit candles. The fear was as strong as when we saw Eichmann enter the concentration camp to oversee our extermination. They turned out to be Tartars from Asia who had also been in concentration camps. Speaking a broken Russian they could be understood as they said, “Do not fear, you are freed from the Nazis. No one will harm you here. Your life is not in danger.” Our fear subsided and we answered as to where we came from.

We were led into a large room containing bunks with mattresses and blankets. After taking warm showers we were given a grey suit, two pairs of stockings and a pair of shoes. These had been uniforms for women in the Luftwaffe. Clean and dressed, we kept staring at each other hardly able to recognize ourselves.

We broke out into song and we danced. Even though we had suffered greatly our spirits had not been broken. Today we were free and we felt that there was nobody in the entire world who was more important than we were.

Bald as we were, proper clothing was a big step in helping us to look like human beings again. We were well fed here and began to gain back some weight. Before long, however, we became

aware of our aches and pains. I became paralyzed on one side, the pain becoming unbearable. About thirty of us women became ill in one way or another.

They sent us to the sanatorium in Shartstadt in the mountains near the Kiel Channel. Tuberculosis was common there and many of our women contracted it. Doctor Kepka and his wife, who ran the place, examined us and separated those with TB from the rest of us. Kepka's resemblance Gecke, the former ghetto commandant, was startling – the same face. Not trusting him we all agreed not to take any medicines from him. Although he quarantined those with TB we would sneak in to visit them. We gave them berries that we had picked in the fields.

One of the young girls in quarantine told us that yesterday Dr. Kepka gave Rifka a needle and this morning she was dead. Unable to find him or his wife all week we confronted him on Friday when he came to weigh us. Filled with anger I told him, "Listen to me, you and your wife. If any of us dies, it is as if someone cut off your arm." I assured him that we knew what he was doing to the young girls and that we know to whom we could report this. I then warned him that if it ever happened again, and he knew what I meant, they would pay with their lives. They both turned white as snow and left the room.

The next day we decided to go into town to the English headquarters. Hearing that Field Marshall Montgomery was there we asked for and gained an audience with him. We told him who we were and he listened to our accusations about Dr. Kepka and his wife. We also stated that our food was being given to high-ranking SS officers at the Kiel Channel. A very warm and concerned man he asked us if we were in need of clothing. After we assured him that we had been given clothing he promised to take care of everything and send his men to investigate the Kepkas and their past.

In a short time, no more Nazis were seen, either at the kitchen or at the channel. Montgomery's officers came to us also bearing stockings and underwear for us to wear. Within a week Dr. Kepka and his wife were no longer to be seen at the sanatorium or in the town of Sharfstadt.

Some of us were feeling better and were anxious to return to our homes. We didn't know where to get a permit and we were penniless. Yet our desire was so strong that no obstacle seemed too great. Once again we appealed to Field Marshall Montgomery this time telephoning him.

Wishing us a hearty good-bye and good luck he sent two corporals to bring us food and twenty English pounds each for our journey.

My friend Ida and I left together as we said our good-byes to the other patients. There were still many very sick people there but Montgomery had sent an English doctor to examine them. He found not a trace of tuberculosis in any of the isolated patients reuniting everyone. The German nurse also told him that Dr. Kepka and his wife had killed patients with injections of poison.

It was difficult to say good-bye but our goal of finding the children we had hidden was uppermost in our minds. Ida had a married daughter who lived either in Kovno or Vilna – she was not sure which. Some women went in search of their husbands.

Many of the women at the sanatorium had already been informed that their husbands were dead. Our men who had been sent to Dachau to camps 1, 2, and 11 had been liberated earlier than we had, and so were free to search for their women. It was in this way that I learned of my husband's death three weeks before the end of the war, March 1945.

After hearing that news my sole aim became to find my son. I felt certain that Hershel and his wife had survived since they had each managed to escape from the ghetto.

CHAPTER 9

We began to ask everyone how we could get to Lithuania, which was not occupied by the Russians. We were told that we had to go to a Russian-occupied city in Germany and obtain written permission from the NKVD, the Russian secret police.

The English corporals drove us into a small town where there was a castle. We asked them to convey our thanks to the Field Marshall. We found people speaking many tongues with the women placed on one side of the castle and the men on the other side. The women – Ukrainian, Russian and Polish – said that the Germans had evicted them from their homes. We later learned, however, that these women willingly accompanied the Nazis when the Allied fronts advanced.

While awaiting our interviews with the NKVD the Russian women told us that we could be packed off to Siberia if they didn't like us. A few days later when it was our turn to be interviewed we trembled but we knew we had no choice in the matter.

I was questioned before Ida. My interviewer asked me how I got to Germany and where I had been in Germany. With trembling voice I told of my being taken from Kovno to a concentration camp in Germany. Before I could finish my answer he barked at me, "Did you collaborate with the Germans against us? Are you a traitor?" I started to cry saying that I was Jewish and mentioned how we had waited for our Russian brothers to liberate us in Kovno.

Looking angrily at me he shouted., "What is your family name? What is the name of your mother and father? Where were you born? How old are you?" Continually writing on an official document he interspersed these questions.

Abruptly, he handed the document that proved to be my permit to me, and he told me to go home. When I asked him where I could get a train home he responded that I must find out for myself. I did not wish to push my luck with too many questions and left the room.

I coached Ida about what to expect in the interview. I told her not to be frightened even though he would try to be intimidating. I suggested that she play along with the Russians' view of themselves as the saviors of the world. I mentioned that I even had to mention the number on the shirt I wore in the concentration camp.

Then she heard her number called and she went in trembling. Her interview was very brief because she said I had talked enough for the both of us. She spoke Russian only since she had been born in Leningrad. Marrying a Jewish engineer from Kovno, she shared our ghetto and concentration camp experiences. Now we both had our permits and were free to go.

When we returned to the castle we found Russian police asking everybody their family name and where they came from. The Russian and Ukrainian women spoke in broken German, trying to pass themselves off as German. The police suddenly shouted, “You traitors! You collaborated with the Germans against your own people, your brothers and sisters. Gather your belongings and line up. All of you except the Jewish women.” The women were lined up three abreast, elegantly dressed and carrying movie cameras and leather suitcases as they marched out.

Other Russian police waiting for them outside confiscated their possessions and led them to wagons destined for Siberia. They were held in these wagons for several days while the Russians rounded up Russian, Ukrainian and Polish men for the journey.

Their cries were ignored by the NKVD who simply ignored us altogether as we passed by. Our roles had been reversed – the lot of us Jews now being better than that of these people. With passports from the police we were free to come and go at will.

With no possessions other than the clothes on our backs we had been walking for hours under a bright sun and in pleasant weather. We came upon a long train and started moving in the same direction it was moving hoping it would slow down enough for us to board it. Luck was with us and the train came to a halt. Tired and hungry we spotted smoke coming from the chimney of one of the cars. Approaching the car we smelled cabbage cooking and saw two Russian officers with their servant.

We introduced ourselves and asked if the train was going to Moscow – knowing that the train to Moscow stopped in Kovno. When they eyed us suspiciously in silence, we added that we were going to Kovno to find our children, showing them our new passports. When we told them that we were told we could ride any train passing through Kovno they at last answered saying that the government forbade our boarding the train.

Seeing that we were hungry they gave us a big bowl of cooked cabbage. Enough to feed an army the entire contents found its way into our stomachs, bit by bit. The officers had in their

possession goods that they had confiscated from the Germans. When they asked us if the clothes we wore were our only clothes, we said they were and adding that the nights were freezing. They gave Ida a sweater but did not have anything in my size.

Finishing our meal, we thanked them for their kindness and left to find a train that would get us from Koenigsburg to Kovno. Having learned the geography of the area we continued walking even though we were exhausted.

Spotting another long train coming to a stop we approached a Russian officer and asked him if we could catch a ride. He started to give us the same answer that this was not allowed. But he added that we could hide on an open car if we could find one. "If you are caught," he said, "you will be put off the train. But in the meantime, you will have traveled some distance and this way, little by little you will get home. You will not be arrested because you have passports." His words were prophetic and we did travel for several days, day and night, from train to train.

We finally reached the Koenigsburg station, a badly bombed out structure. Many Russian soldiers, women and children sat on the cement pavement waiting for the train. We had some bread that the Russian officers' servant had sneaked to us but we had no water. Sitting on the ground we were at least grateful to be getting closer to home. The anticipation of seeing our loved ones started an endless flow of tears of happiness.

A passing Russian officer hearing us talking turned and asked, "Little sisters, are you Jewish?" We answered with joy, "Of course we are Jewish." When we asked him how to get to Kovno he quickly informed us that the big train on track three was going there. He told us that we could hide under the automobiles that were taken from the Germans. He showed us where to find clear hot water and gave us some hard sugar and dried bread strips. His eyes filled with tears as he left us, never to be seen again.

After walking some distance, then standing in line for a long time for water, we finally got something to drink with our bread. Refreshed, we searched for the train that would take us to Kovno. Spotting the train we could see that all the cars were loaded with trucks and automobiles.

Some Russian soldiers sat on the ground, others slept and still others cursed – cursed their government, the Germans and even the prospect of going home. We waited for darkness so that

we could find a hiding place undetected and keep hidden until the train moved out of the station. Without a watch we didn't know what time it left.

The ride was bumpy and we were constantly being thrown from side to side. Suddenly the motor of the automobile under which we had hidden started up releasing exhaust gases in our faces and dripping hot oil on us. We not only had to keep quiet, but also were also unable to move – the only way out being to fall off the train. The Russian was testing the automobile for what seemed an eternity finally leaving us with our faces and clothes soaked with oil.

Relief from the hot exhaust soon brought unwelcome cold as we lay chilled throughout the night. Not knowing where we were we decided to jump off the train at the nearest human settlement. Seeing houses and fields of hay we jumped onto bundles of hay and hid as the train continued onward.

As I looked at Ida I couldn't believe my eyes – her face completely covered with black oil. Seeing that I was the same way, she laughed. Waiting for the train to pass completely out of sight we crawled out from the haystacks. We found the nearest farmhouse and asked the farmwoman for hot water to wash the oil off our faces. She laughed hard at the sight of us but was most sympathetic when we told her how we achieved such a frightful appearance. After giving us hot water for our faces she fed us hot milk and bread. We thanked her for her kindness and departed immediately.

We spotted a slow-moving long train loaded with trucks, automobiles and motorcycles. This time when we boarded we hid inside rather than under an automobile. As we talked I mentioned that I sensed that we were not far from Lithuania. We did not speak lovingly of the cities of our birth because of all the bitter memories. Instead we focused our attention exclusively on our family members who hopefully had survived. We arrived at a train station where another long train stood loaded with vehicles and household goods taken as war booty by the Russians. When it became obvious that our train would go no further for some time, we got off.

Searching for a good car on which to ride we approached a Russian officer on one car and asked him if we could ride the train as far as Kovno. We told him that we had NKVD passports and that we were looking for our children. Suddenly glaring at me he spit out. "Jewess, why doesn't anyone like your people?" As we walked away stunned I remarked to Ida, my voice almost gone,

that these were not the same Russians we knew in Kovno in 1940. Feeling betrayed and disheartened I observed that the Russians had learned from the Nazis – not to mention from Stalin.

We then spotted a car full of German women and we boarded it hiding in the corner. Seconds after the door closed we felt the train lurch into motion. We did not see two Russian soldiers who were aboard the dark car but we soon heard their presence. Women started to scream – some crying, some laughing. When we finally could see the source of the commotion, all we could do was to sit trembling and pray that they would not approach us.

Before long, however, they extended their census of women to our corner of the car. Lighting one match after another, one of the soldiers said to his companion, “Harushea botke carsevea” (“Nice girls, pretty.”). I immediately began coughing and said to Ida in Russian, “You know, my tuberculosis is acting up again and I am spitting up blood. We shouldn’t have left the sanatorium so soon.” These soldiers – called Kalmeeks – were of small stature and had small eyes but their rifles seemed as big as they were. When one of them asked if I had tuberculosis I answered, “Yes. Both of us have just left the sanatorium” – which was certainly true. He shouted, “You are contagious and must leave the train as soon as it stops.”

The soldiers did not wait for the train to stop, throwing us out after it had slowed down. Crying tears of joy, we were both amazed at the speed and ingenuity of my response to the soldiers. Pleased, but surprised that everything turned out so well we started walking along the tracks in search of another train going our way.

As we approached what we thought was Etkoven, at the German Lithuanian border, we came up to a long train that was standing still and climbed into an empty car with open doors. I was reassuring Ida that we would soon find our loved ones when we heard the voice of a high-ranking Russian officer, his chest decked out with medals. It became obvious to us that he was Jewish when he asked us if we were Jewish and where we were going. After we gave our answer he told us that the Germans in Minsk had killed his wife and children. He added that he was going home to see if he could find any surviving relatives but his voice didn’t sound hopeful. This officer, appearing over fifty years old, took a great interest in us. The three of us cried together like babies.

Our Jewish officer continued to ask us questions as the train got closer to the border. I told him that I knew that my son was with my brother and sister-in-law but that Ida didn't know if her child was in Kovno or Vilna. Just then we heard two soldiers behind the officer say, "Look at how many medals the Jew officer has. He probably earned them at the supply depot." Without saying a word, the expression on his face changed, as if a dark cloud had passed over it.

Our conversation made the time pass quickly and we suddenly found ourselves at the border. Two Russian officers approached us at the border asking to see our permits. Although satisfied, they still insisted on searching us. When they found watches that men had given us to pass on to their families the officers confiscated them.

The train remained at the border for a long time trying everyone's patience as it got dark. The Jewish officer asked, "Would you allow me to come with you to Kovno to witness your reunion with your son?" I was pleased to have him accompany me for I started to tremble the closer we got to Kovno and welcome his support.

I started to visualize the train station with its marble walls inside and out. All I could see outside now was pitch black – the mysterious dark a perfect harbinger for the unknown that awaited me in Kovno. The train whistle suddenly blew and the officer announced that we would be in Kovno in a few minutes.

With hearts pounding now we strained our eyes trying to see the train station. All that we were to find were some small wooden barracks and one large one – the train station having been totally destroyed by bombs. The train came to a stop and the three of us left and headed for the large barracks.

Inside, Russian soldiers were lying on the ground in the corners. The air inside was so foul that one could hardly breathe. We thought we would have to remain here all night since there was a curfew until 5:00 a.m. – and here it was, the middle of the night. We were pleasantly surprised when our officer friend offered to take us now.

The road home was very long and hard, longer and harder even than all the train rides we had to endure just to get to the Kovno railroad station. Not one streetlight penetrated the curtain of darkness that embraced us. The only lights that we glimpsed were the flickers of candles that passed furtively through cracks in the wood or bricks of the houses. The road at least was

familiar to me. I related to my two companions how I used to walk it every day for exercise when I was pregnant.

I explained the various landmarks as we passed them restoring my love for the city where I was born and raised. I told of my graduation from the Hebrew High School where I earned the highest honors in Hebrew. Kovno had been a Jewish town with a strong Jewish cultural heritage. It had four Hebrew high schools and one Jewish high school. I had suppressed my feeling of pride about Kovno until now but was no longer doing so.

As we walked and talked the tears ran down our cheeks. The Jewish officer started to cry with so much passion but we understood his heartbreak. Knowing his experiences commanding Russian soldiers against the Germans we well knew he had much to cry about.

I pointed out the various Jewish houses even though we were sure that the Germans and their Lithuanian collaborators had murdered its former occupants. Now a city without Jews, the way to Hershel's house was full of heartbreak. We now passed the well-known Kovno Sorbonne where students used to meet in the evening. The memories felt like yesterday, yet the pain of the intervening period made it difficult to think about them.

We now turned into the main street of Laisves Blvd. where nine out of ten stores and businesses had belonged to Jews. Now, however, everything was closed and boarded up except for a small number of stores that were run by the government. On this boulevard the youth of the city used to sit on benches every evening and talk about their girlfriends and boyfriends. Now this beautiful street was empty – empty of Jews. The officer commented on the quiet and loneliness of the street.

As if he weren't aware I had to point out to him that all of this destruction had been planned and carried out by Hitler and his Lithuanian collaborators. They destroyed our parents, brothers and sisters causing an entire generation of Jews to disappear from Lithuania. It is likely that any Jews who escaped to Russia at the outbreak of the war would now return to Vilna, not Kovno.

I took the officer to the square where the opera house was. As we entered the square we found every structure intact and well maintained. Apparently, only the railroad station and the electric power station had been bombed. We told of hearing the renowned female soloist Grigaitiene and the male soloist Kypros Petruskas – called a second Caruso. Here we saw La Scala Menuatay in

the lead role in *Madame Butterfly* – her magnificent voice still ringing in my ears. I had spent many beautiful evenings there with my husband.

Leaving the square we walked over to Kestucio Street on the other side of the opera house. There we saw the Palestinian Embassy across from my uncle Gadalya's large brick house. Many Jews going to Israel got their travel affidavits there. The wealthy Jews of Kovno had built their houses here not too many years ago – only to see it empty now.

Each new sight brings more memories tumbling forth. There was the Holtsman house. The second of the three Holtsman daughters, a beautiful girl, eloped with a Lithuanian officer and converted to Christianity – only to die of childbirth after one year. Her parents did not attend the Christian funeral. This did not bother the Jewish officer, saying there were many mixed marriages in Russia. Then there was my aunt's store – now boarded up – on the main street. Next was the Lithuanian high school where our murdering collaborators, our former neighbors, were educated. Then I showed him an entire street of Jewish businesses. One of these was Vinacrus Photography, which had photographed all the graduates of the Hebrew and Jewish high schools.

The officer looked at us and said quietly, "By all rights, you did have a Jewish city." "Yes," came the answer, "until the war broke out and the Lithuanians joined with the Germans against the Jews."

We proceeded down these streets that now had a bloody pedigree. We arrived at Ozeshkene Street where Hershel, his wife and Alex were now living. As we crossed the street my limbs started to tremble and I lost my voice. For a moment, we stopped and looked around at the large houses with nothing but a deathly quiet to greet us. I could only think of this street that had once teemed with laughing Jewish children. Despite the reassurances of Ida and the officer I could not control my feeling of weakness.

I thought about the fact that my brother had been told I had died – my main concern was with how Alex would react to seeing me. Hershel had buried what he thought were my remains and my burned belongings in the cemetery at Slobodka. I explained that those were actually the remains of the people who had occupied our bunker, borrowed my clothes and were then destroyed when the Nazis destroyed the ghetto.

The officer suggested knocking on the door and gently breaking the news of my survival. Despite my objection that the sight of him would arouse their fears that the NKVD was surrounding them he assured me that he would be careful.

At the foot of the stairs my feet started to get numb and I cried that I was paralyzed. Now we got to the top step and the officer told me to hide behind him as Ida stood beside him. Counting, “one, two, three,” he quietly knocked on the door, which brought a new siege of trembling in me. I could hardly wait to hear Hershel’s voice.

Suddenly I heard Hershel saying, “Who is there?” The officer answered, “Please open the door. We are your relatives.” There is unbroken silence. The officer said, “Please open the door Hershel and you will see your sister.”

Opening the door slowly Hershel turned as white as a sheet responding, “I was told that my sister died by the German hand,” and then sighed, “She is dead. I am left to raise her child.” Unable to stand it any longer I jumped out from my hiding place and shouted, “Hershel, my dear brother. It is I, your sister Rachel. Is Alex with you?”

Hershel looked at me and ran to his wife shouting, “Chena, dead people have come to see us. Rachel is here from the concentration camp.” His wife began to cry hysterically saying that she was afraid to come to the door. Ida and the officer were now crying uncontrollably. I was now in the role of the strong one telling myself that I must control myself.

I kept calling my sister-in-law’s name, telling her that I am Alex’s mother, her sister-in-law. She slowly came closer to me looking at my skeptically. I can’t say I could blame her as I didn’t have any hair and was very thin and wearing a dress made from a tablecloth. Now looking at me in amazement she suddenly grabbed me and kissed me, saying, “Look what those murdering Germans have done to you! Look at what has become of you.”

My first immediate question was, “Is Alex here, and is he well?” She grabbed my hand and led me into a large room where Alex was lying in a white bed with snow-white sheets. I looked in and when I saw him lying there with his eyes wide open I sensed that he hadn’t slept all night. Ida and the officer stood in the doorway witnessing this reunion with tears running down their faces. I vowed not to cry in front of Alex.

I tried to approach Alex very slowly so as not to frighten him. This would require all of my courage and self-control and I was afraid that my feet would become paralyzed again. Making sure that he would be allowed to recognize me slowly I first asked him, “Do you believe that your mother is alive and has come back to you?”

Without thinking for even a moment he began to cry and scream that his mother was dead along with his father – the both of them killed by the Germans.

I tried to get a little closer to him but not too close. I just listened to his crying without answering him. Then I posed this question: “Would you believe me if I told you that your mother is standing beside you and talking with you?”

He looked at me with his big blue eyes never taking them off me. Maybe, I hoped, just maybe, he will recognize me. After a pause I told him how I took him out of the ghetto because the Germans wanted to kill him just like all the other children in the ghetto. Then I asked him if he still sees the Lithuanian woman, named Lucy, in whose house he had hidden. Looking right at him I could see the struggle within him as he was trying hard to determine my identity. My appearance must have been as baffling to him as it was to my sister-in-law.

I kept asking questions: “How were things for you at Lucy’s? Did you get along well there?” I kept hoping that the questions I asked would eventually reveal that only his mother could know the things I was asking. My own struggle was difficult but I realized that my son’s struggle was even more difficult.

Suddenly, Alex screamed for his aunt to come and take him away from this witch, crying repeatedly, “She is absolutely not my mother.” Listening with breaking heart I reminded myself that I must control my feelings. Chena quieted him down. Through all of this, still, he could not take his eyes off me.

Knowing that he was too young to remember life at home I was sure he would remember life in the ghetto. After a little pause Hershel asked, “Do you really not remember your own mother? Can you believe that your mother would live and come back to see you?” He, his wife and our guests did not stop crying but I continued to control myself.

I then asked Alex, “Why didn’t you sleep tonight? Do you believe that your mother had come back?” Gradually moving closer to his bed I sat down on the edge of his bed but this time he did not react. Without saying a word he kept his eyes fastened on me. He then asked his aunt to light a candle so that he could look at this lady with a light on. I said to him again, “Alex, I am your mother. I survived so that I could once again be your mother.” He shouted, protesting, “My mother was beautiful. She had long black hair and big brown eyes and you have small eyes and no hair at all.” With that he jumped up and ran to one of his dressers taking out the picture of me with my high school diploma. Agitated, he shouted, “Look here lady, this is my mother with long hair and big eyes, and you don’t have neither one. You are not my mother!”

It took every ounce of self-control but I remained strong. I still hoped that he would recognize me after a while. I could sense everyone standing in the doorway watching and listening. Outside it was pitch black while inside a single candle burned.

I edged closer to Alex his eyes still glued to me. With each moment I had to remind myself to exercise self-control. Changing his line of questioning he now asked, “How do you know that I was at Lucy’s?” After telling him that I took him out of the ghetto to her he responded that somebody must have told me all of this because his mother really died in Germany and will never come back.

Physically exhausted and emotionally drained I now sustained myself solely on hope. He held my picture in his hand looking back and forth at the picture and me. At intervals I asked, “Have you recognized your mother a little bit? Looking at me again he said, “You know lady, if you are my mother, let’s wait until it gets light outside. Then I will be able to get a real good look at you.”

I patted his head and told him that it would soon be light out so that he would then be able to recognize his true mother. This time he didn’t call for his aunt to take him away from me but actually moved closer to me. I felt as though Alex was close enough to hear my heart beat which made me struggle all the more to stay calm. Our eyes kept meeting and I sensed that I could hear his heart beating. I kept assuring him that I was his mother.

In the meanwhile my friends entered the room anxious to know the very moment that Alex recognized me. Seeing them, Alex turned to me and asked, “Lady, can you tell me what those

people are doing in my room and who they are?" I told him Ida's name and explained that she had been in the concentration camp with me. I said that she was looking for her daughter in Vilna but wanted to see my reunion first so that she would know what to expect with her daughter. I explained that the Russian officer was Jewish, that we met him on the train, and that he also wanted to witness my reunion before going back to Russia to look for his family.

Alex listened intently to my every word looking back and forth between my friends and myself. I added that the officer had little hope of finding anyone alive because the Germans had killed all the Jews in his town of Minsk. Suddenly, Alex jumped out of bed and running up to the officer tried to assure him, "Don't worry, you will find your family." Hearing this the officer broke down in tears and we all cried with him.

Hershel and Chena hearing our cries came and took Ida and the officer into another room. Alone in the room with my child we remained silent but he continued to eye me anxiously. As day broke, Alex continually compared me with my picture looking in vain for a resemblance. He looked desperately, for he wanted a mother.

I told myself to remain strong. It won't be long before he finally recognizes me. As we continued to gaze at each other I could hear the crying from the other room. I could feel Alex's torment and I sensed that Chena could as well as she periodically came in to ask him if he wanted anything, only to be ignored by him. I could hear her telling everyone to stay out of the room.

I ceased asking Alex questions as I realized he was emotionally exhausted. Time dragged on very slowly. A hundred thoughts went through my mind – my hope that this phase would soon be over, my desire to put my arms around him and draw him to my heart, my regret that Pina couldn't be here to share this moment, my need to remain strong, and the ordeal my son was going through.

Pretending to look out the window out of the corner of my eye I could see him stealing glances at me. My skin tingled as I sensed him moving closer to me. Suddenly, with impatience in his voice he said, "Lady, can you tell me if it's light enough outside?" I told him that it was almost morning and that it would soon be very light.

Reaching over and grabbing my hand he said, "Lady, come closer to the window. Maybe I will be able to recognize you." He looked at the picture and then at me and announced, "I don't see

anything that is the same between you and the picture. I can't see that you are my mother."

Going back to sit on the edge of the bed he continued to compare me with my picture. It must have been seconds but seemed like minutes before he jumped off the bed again. Taking me by the hand he said, "If you say that you are really my mother come to the window again." He kept comparing me with the picture.

Suddenly, he shouted, "Momma. You are my mother. I am not an orphan any longer." He didn't cry but wrapped his arms around me so tightly that we were inseparable. Then he said, "Pappa will also come back. Everybody told me that you were dead but you came home."

He asked me innumerable questions. For example, did I see his father when I was in Kovno? I had the double task of answering as many questions as possible and being truthful about his father in a gentle way. He didn't leave my side the rest of the day.

He spoke to our guests asking them all kinds of questions. He asked Ida if he could come with her when she went to find her daughter. He also advised her that it would take a long time for her daughter to recognize her as her mother. The officer lifted Alex onto his lap. Alex began to play with his medals and asked him many questions about the war. The officer was absolutely amazed at how knowledgeable such a young child was. As I sipped coffee at the table I heard Alex asking him if he was also going to meet his children and if he had also been in the ghetto.

The officer looked at him, his eyes filling with tears, and explained that the Germans murdered his entire family at the very time he was on the front fighting the German army. I could see the expression change on Alex's face showing great compassion for this soldier.

The mood in my brother's house began to change. Everyone felt great joy at the scene of my son and me hugging and kissing each other.

CHAPTER 10

My guests stayed a few more days in my brother's house. Rested, they each left to go their own way to find their families, with our blessings. Alex continued to stay by my side day and night.

I got progressively weaker physically until I was unable to get up one morning. My whole left side was paralyzed including my hand and foot. The family called a doctor to the house and he gave me a crutch and some medicine. This frightened Alex and he waited on me hand and foot. It was months before I was able to walk without a crutch or to move my arm normally. Only after I stopped using my crutch did I feel my strength really start to return.

Alex was constantly looking into my eyes and asking me questions. For example, where was I and what did I have to endure in the concentration camp? Nothing could tear him from my side not even the children in the street who called on him to go play with them. Even when I begged him to go play assuring him that I would never again leave him, he wouldn't budge.

The only thing that would take Alex from my side was school. In the mornings he kissed me good-bye to leave for kindergarten as he looked back at me lovingly wishing he were already returning. Every moment he spent with me was precious to him. Once I had recovered I had made up my mind that Alex and I would go to Vilkamir, the town of his father's birth. It would be very difficult to get there I told him as the trains and buses were not running. We had to count on luck and hope that an army truck would stop and give us a ride for the seventy kilometers.

After several attempts I succeeded in stopping a truck, which was already carrying a few Lithuanian women also going to Vilkamir. The women were very kind to Alex and he thanked them for the fruit and candy they gave him. I didn't feel like talking to them as I resented having to continue wandering the countryside homeless and dirty.

The truck arrived in Vilkamir after several hours and I thanked the driver. Walking through the streets I did not notice a single Jew – in a town once populated by thousands of Jews. As we passed my grandmother's house, my uncle's house and his two pharmacies, everything was shut up tight and deathly quiet. It was as if nobody had ever been here except the Lithuanians. Unable to hold back any longer I cried out about the injustice of the Nazis and the Lithuanians as Alex tried to comfort me.

The nice weather allowed us to walk all over town and Alex wanted to see everything. All of a sudden, we spotted Shayna, of whom we had heard nothing for months since the day she escaped the ghetto. Only when I had reached Hershel's place in Kovno did he tell us that she was alive and living in Vilkamir. She ran up to us, hugged and kissed Alex, then hugged and kissed me.

She took us to her home where we were grateful to be able to bathe and change our clothes. She was so happy to see us – particularly Alex – that she could barely contain herself. We were to stay at Shayna's for a few months until I was able to secure the release of my father-in-law's home from the government. We now had our own place and Alex could resume kindergarten. All the stress had now made my other foot paralyzed and I once more used a crutch.

Things settled down to a routine. I used ration cards for food. Shayna came every morning to take Alex to kindergarten and picked him up from school as well. The rations allowed us just enough food to prevent outright starvation.

One week after moving into our home I received a letter from the NKVD ordering me to report in their office at 4:00 p.m. sharp. Walking into the office on my crutch I addressed the Russian officer standing there, "Tavarishloitenand (Comrade lieutenant), may I sit down?" "What kind of tavarish friend am I to you?" he shouted at me, "Why are you not working?"

I told him of coming from a concentration camp of finding my child and of being paralyzed after being here only two weeks. The lack of compassion in his face suggested to me that he was no friend of the Jews. This reminded me of the Jewish officer's remarks about the Russians learning hatred of the Jews from the Nazis. At least allowing me to speak he then said, "Tomorrow – and I mean tomorrow – you will start to work as the head bookkeeper in a shop cooperative." This news depressed me but I had no choice. As I turned to leave he walked over to me and added shaking his finger, "You will be held responsible for everything and will pay with your life if anything is missing."

Shaken, I finally found my way home and I told Shayna about this new development. I commented that if a shoemaker took a scrap of leather home to fix his child's shoe I would sit in jail for the rest of my days. I went to work the next day realizing that I would not work here for very long. The three of us decided that we would have to run away from here soon.

Nothing at work served to change my mind about that. Life at work became more intolerable with each passing day. No matter how well I treated the workers they showed absolutely no gratitude. I always looked the other way when the shoemakers brought shoes from the wives and children to be repaired or when they used scraps to repair their own goods – even though I knew that every scrap had to be accounted for at year's end.

I jeopardized my position, even my life, by looking the other way. Skeptical from the start, and growing even more depressed, I knew I had to find a way to leave. I would arrive home at night late, exhausted and my head swimming from all the arithmetic I did all day.

Shayna could see that I was upset but she said nothing. We sat down to eat the supper she had prepared. We conversed in Lithuanian so that we could talk confidentially. I told her that we must leave this place and the sooner the better.

CHAPTER 11

We worked out an itinerary, going first to Vilna, and then to Poland. Once in Poland, we would be in a new world. Shayna was afraid to leave because of the risk of death if we were caught sneaking across the border. When I compared staying and struggling in Vilkamir to a living death, she at first was not sure, but finally agreed with me. Poland would be a stepping-stone for reaching Israel.

Early in the morning carrying our few personal belongings we hitched a ride from a truck headed to Ponivezh. Arriving three hours later we gave the driver three packs of cigarettes for which he was extremely grateful – everything being rationed. We found a place to sit and eat the food we had packed. After walking around town for a while it was time to go on. We flagged down a military truck, which fortunately was driven by a Jewish fellow. Asking us in Yiddish where we wanted to go he gave Alex some cookies and told us to get on the back of the truck. The trip to Vilna was bone rattling but Alex never complained. Driving all night we arrived in Vilna the next morning exhausted.

Shayna had friends in Vilna who could help us buy forged passports that would let us get to Poland. The way would be difficult because we would have to change trains many times. We were afraid of the Polish people and did not want to wander around train stations. Shayna's friends warned us of a Polish group – called "acoftsus" – who went around killing Jews.

Leaving Vilna, our first stop in Poland was to be the town of Lodg. A long ride took us through many towns and we never saw a Jew in any of them. Arriving in Lodg we found it to be a large city that had been razed by bombs.

Penniless, hungry and thirsty, we walked around lost hoping to find a Jewish face. Finding a young Jewish couple on the street we were overjoyed and asked for directions to the Jewish agency. The couple accompanied us plying us with all kinds of questions about Alex and about how he had survived.

At the Jewish Agency we found many Jews from various Polish cities but none from Kovno. Asking to see the director I broke down crying as I explained that it was very difficult for me to ask someone else for help. The director interrogated Shayna and me endlessly, to the point of

humiliation. As we left his office Alex told me not to cry promising to go to work and earn money when he got bigger.

As we waited outside his office the director came out and asked if we wanted to travel further. We would have to go to Germany first but then could travel anywhere in the world where we had relatives who would take us. He gave us a few hundred zlotkas and instructed us to go to a specific hostel where we could sleep.

On the way to the hostel, we stopped in a small Jewish grocery store, where we bought some buns for Alex and some bread for all of us. We sat down in a grassy area to eat but our fatigue made us impatient to reach the hostel. Eating ravenously, we rested awhile and got back on our feet. At the hostel we saw some Lithuanian Jews we knew who told me that Hershel was in Lodg and gave me his address. Too excited to rest, we went right over to see Hershel who was ecstatic at seeing us. He told a similar story about his difficult and frightening trip to Poland.

Thankful for leaving the Russians behind us we tried to resolve the problem of getting from Poland to Germany. We would have to find the Brichah, the group that would lead Jews from Lodg to Germany – and in Germany, another group to help us to Israel.

Walking through the streets of Lodg, the four of us could see that it too was once a Jewish city – Jewish names on boarded shops seemed like the fossilized remains of that seemingly remote time. Alex observed that the people were not very friendly. Meeting two young men who were conversing in Hebrew we asked them the location of the Brichah and they led us there. Reaching the Brichah, we were told that we would be picked up on Tuesday at a specified address. We left the Brichah's cellar quarters with thanks and a hearty "shalom."

Returning to where Hershel was staying we confided in his host that the Brichah would pick us up on Tuesday. This pleased him because he knew of others who had to wait much longer. He thought it was because we were Lithuanians and because Alex had brought us luck.

We waited a long week for Tuesday to arrive counting each day as a step closer to our goal. I had to explain to Alex that we would not be going directly to Israel but first had to make a long journey to Germany. On the appointed day, young men knocked on our door. greeted us with a hearty "shalom." and asked. "Mochaneim (ready)?" We thanked Hershel's host and said

“shalom” and “todah” (thank you) expressing our hope of seeing him again in Israel and we all left.

We went single file down a narrow street to the waiting trucks. The young men drove us for a long time until we reached the woods where we stopped and were fed. The men gave Alex cookies conversing with him as if he were a young adult. Alex told them much about his young life. They told me that Alex was only the third Jewish child that they had brought out with the Brichah.

We finished our meal, brought back aboard, and continued our journey. We traveled all night without stopping until daybreak. Alex slept the whole time under our things. The young men stopped the truck and telling us to get off led us into a house in a small town on the Polish-German border – another hostel.

There were many others already there. We were dirty and tired but we were given soap and water with which to wash. We were then seated at a table where we were fed hot milk, tea, coffee and fresh hot buns. The young men entered and joining us at the table told us that we had to wait for a young man named Moshe.

The sleeping arrangements were terrible, consisting of beds with metal springs but no mattresses. Everybody padded the springs with his or her belongings. Everyone loved Alex, speaking to him like an adult – for truly he had been robbed of his childhood. Ten days passed quickly although Hershel grew impatient to be there already. I asked him “Where is there? Who is waiting for us? Not our mother, or father, or our little sister, or Alex’s father. Everyone is dead. Only the Jewish people in Israel wait for us.”

Hershel said he would wait for his wife to arrive in Germany and then they would go to her relatives in America. Shayna said she would also go to her own relatives in America. Israel was the only destination for Alex and me. Talking about our plans helped us temporarily to forget the difficult journey that still awaited us.

One morning, the man named Moshe entered the house. He read off a list of names and said that those people must prepare to leave. The four of us were happily on the list and we left as part of a party of thirty – twenty-seven men, two women and my Alex. The cook brought me a package for Alex containing milk and cookies and I kissed and thanked her.

Boarding a truck in the pitch dark we were taken a short way and unloaded in a big field. We were told to walk straight until we got to a lake where someone would be waiting to take us across to Germany. Alex kept falling on the wet ground so I finally carried him in my arms. With my burden, I told them to go ahead and I would catch up. Alex and I had to hurry into a small boat as the Brichah said that we were the first to be taken across the river. The thirty of us were hidden in a large pigeon coop until the guards passed.

At this point, Moshe entered the coop, which started to collapse. He urged us to go quickly, but singly, to the train, which was not far away. Receiving the tickets Moshe distributed, Alex and I left together while Hershel went with Shayna. Seeing German police with big dogs we quickly ducked into the station as did Hershel and Shayna. We had to be sure to get on the right train, which would take us to West Berlin.

It was nine in the morning when a train full of Jews arrived. Impatient, Hershel asked a German man where they were taking these Jews. The man, showing identification that he was a police detective, promptly arrested Hershel and placed him on the train with the other Jews. We were fearful that they would send him back to Lithuania but I remembered that he had Polish documents. I realized that the worst that might happen would be that he would be sent to Poland from where he could make his way back to Germany.

The three of us went into a cafeteria to wait for our train. Soon we were able to board preoccupied with Hershel's misfortune. Alex kept asking where his uncle was and I consoled him that we would meet up in Berlin.

A German man sitting beside us listened to our conversation intently. When he asked me where we were going I was not frightened somehow, and answered, "West Berlin." When he asked, "Are you going to the Jewish camp?", I answered that we were. Looking amazed he informed me that we were on the wrong train but assured me that he would find out the right train and its scheduled departure. Checking his map he announced that we could catch the Berlin train at the next station.

Standing in the station waiting for the train I heard some people speaking Yiddish. I walked right up to them and they were equally as happy to see a Jewish woman with her child. They had a little girl and were going to Shlochtenza, near West Berlin, where there was a camp for Jewish

survivors. Alex made friends with the little girl and we adults did likewise. They invited us to join them in the cafeteria for something to drink. There, they told us that they had given a Polish family all their possessions down to the last pillow to hide them. At least she and I saved our children, I thought, as many of us lost all our children.

We heard the West Berlin train arriving so we all went out to the platform. We found the train crowded with Germans going to West Berlin. The children quickly fell asleep. During the journey, which lasted through the night, we talked about our respective experiences, reopening old wounds. Tired as we were, we were afraid to fall asleep, lest we miss the Schlochtenza station. While we conversed, we looked at the faces of the German passengers, seeing nothing but the faces of Nazi murders who had taken the best and the dearest away from us and had left us to wander the world in uncertainty. We looked sadly at how thin our children were. I assured her that they would both grow to be fine young people and a credit to their parents and to Israel. Each of us told her own story and I remarked that each Jew was a walking tragedy.

Hearing the announcement suddenly that we had arrived in Berlin made us very happy. We still had several hours before we reached Schlochtenza in the American sector. At least here, we were not afraid to speak in Yiddish, as we had been in Poland or in the other sectors of Germany. Alex's head rested on Shayna's lap. When they announced our arrival, Shayna awakened Alex, and we continued on to the camp. We finally felt totally free of fear – something we had not felt for many years. Sensing that someone was following us we turned to find a German woman who had overheard our conversation. She told us that we would reach Schlochtenza, a large Jewish camp, in half an hour and that she would escort us there.

As Alex was very sleepy Shayna and I took turns carrying him. He asked many questions: Would we be able to stay at the camp and not have to leave? Will the good Germans be there and let us live in peace? Some questions I had no answers for but the others I tried to answer honestly. I assured him that while I didn't know where we would end up we would be safe from now on – wherever that was. This answer seemed to satisfy him and his need for questioning.

Before long we found ourselves at the camp gates. We thanked the German woman for her guidance and she wished us good luck. Two Jewish camp police at the gate asked for verification of our identities. We waited in a room where the children were treated to hot milk, cookies and chocolate.

We were separated into different rooms each having clean beds and bedding and a sink. Exhausted, I fell onto the bed and sank into sleep. Getting up after awhile I looked out the window to see a children's playground, a football field and a basketball court. The Jews in the camp seemed to be very comfortable.

Shortly a woman came in and told me that the camp had many surviving children and a school for them. Then a man came in introducing himself as a camp employee. He asked me for the location of relatives anywhere in the world, where we came from and whether we had any friends or relatives in the camp. He was very friendly, speaking my kind of Yiddish.

When he asked where my husband was I didn't answer right away. I paused and said he was in the cemetery "where all of our sacrifices were buried." He asked me where and how he died and I told him precisely in Dachau, camp number one, at the end of March, 1945. He then gave me a card telling me which building and which room to go to.

Gathering our belongings the three of us went to our assigned room. It was a large room with two big beds and a small child's bed as well as a sink and bathtub. We were very happy to get such a large, clean room with all of its comforts.

Lunch was served in a large dining room. The children were being served separately. We were given coupons with which to get clothing. Shayna got some clothing, but I did not, for I didn't want to take anything from anyone. I gave Alex permission to go outside to play with the other children. I could see how quickly he made friends with the other children. From appearances, he seemed to have forgotten his difficult past.

Shayna and I walked around the camp hoping to see people we knew from our hometown. I suddenly spotted Micha, a young man from Kovno, and he recognized me. He had been with Pina in Dachau and told me of how he died. First blinded by the dust at the ammunition plant where he worked, Pina then contracted tuberculosis and died three weeks before the war's end.

Micha told me that he was waiting for an affidavit that would permit him to go to America. He promised to give me his business of selling American cigarettes in the Russian sector with all the risks that entailed. He also advised Shayna on the proper procedures for getting papers to get to America. Following his advice, Shayna was able to get her papers quickly. When the time came

for her to leave, Alex cried bitterly. Shayna said that when she got to America she would send papers for us to come.

After Micha left, I decided not to take over his cigarette business because of the risk. I did meet a man from Wilmersdorf who had converted to Christianity who offered me the opportunity to sell his women's nightgowns in the camp. I took his offer and began selling right away. I started to earn a lot of money in a very short time. I also began to sell herring, paying one mark for each and selling each for three marks.

I could now afford nice things for Alex and myself. In spite of everything, however, I was very lonely. When others went out dancing I stayed in my room with my child. I met Boris, a single man who was as lonely as I was, and who had lost everyone in the war. He treated Alex like a son. We decided to marry and have been married for thirty-six years.

Boris and I decided to immigrate to Israel. To do that, we had to sign up to go to Bavaria. When our names were called, we were to ride in large military trucks to Landsburg where my cousin Fival was director of the displaced persons' camp. Despite the anticipated physical rigors of the trip, we had food to eat, and I of course had some money. Alex was not reluctant to travel now and he asked what country we were about to enter. When I told him that we were going to try to find Hershel he became all the more eager to leave.

We said our good-byes to the friends we had made in the camp. Alex did likewise telling his friends he would probably see them in the Landsburg camp. I brought two pillows and a comforter and these provided a soft place for Alex to sleep on the journey. Alex brought his books and toys.

The big trucks were loaded beyond capacity with people but fortunately they were open enough to prevent suffocation. We passed through some beautiful country with many towns and villages. I told Alex we would be passing through the town where his father died and I promised to show him the place. Sighing, he asked me not to forget my promise.

My son's experiences and troubles made him wise and mature beyond his years. I would chide myself for telling him so much but would remember how he would ask me questions over again until I answered him. He hungered for knowledge, and I taught him Hebrew and mathematics during our long journey.

After the truck stopped so we could get refreshments we continued into the night. We all fell asleep. As day began to break we awoke to the truck stopping. Two young men boarded the truck announcing our arrival in Landsburg and began calling off our names. My cousin Fival met us giving us a place to live in town rather than in the camp. Alex wanted to unpack so that we could go look for Hershel.

Before we could even leave Hershel walked in. Excited, Alex grabbed him and introduced him to Boris: "This is momma's husband and my father." Boris and Alex had gotten off to a good start. Boris loved him very much and thought he was very smart.

Alex kept asking Hershel how he got to Bavaria, as well as other questions. Hershel promised that he would enroll Alex in the camp school tomorrow and that he would return with Fival that evening. After bathing and eating we lay down to rest. Around six o'clock, Hershel came with a box of food and Fival brought sweets and fruit for Alex as well as a football and a box of toys. Alex was thrilled with the ball and went outside to play with it.

Fival asked me if I had seen his wife whom he had married just days before the war broke out. I told him the truth, painful as it was. I learned in Berlin from women from her concentration camp that she had committed suicide. A Jewish girl from Hungary had falsely accused her of stealing her dress. Despite her innocence, she couldn't live with the shame and drowned herself in the lake. Shocked he protested, "My wife would never do that."

I then asked him how Pina had lived at Dachau since Fival had been there with him. I told Fival I felt Pina would break down physically and mentally because he could not bear separation from his family. Fival confirmed my concerns saying he was exhausted and emaciated when he died.

Pina would have been of good use to Israel for he was an ardent Zionist. I made it a practice to tell Alex what kind of father he had and encouraged him to be kind, honest and a good patriot. Fival commented that Pina had left behind a fine example of himself in Alex.

I informed Fival that we wanted to go to Israel thinking that it would be easy. But there were two ways to get there – illegally or with a permit – and both were almost impossible. In the meantime, Boris had corresponded with his cousins in Winnipeg, informing them that he, his wife and child were in Bavaria. At the same time war broke out in Israel and volunteers were needed to fight.

Boris quickly decided to join in the fighting and tore up the papers for us to go to Canada. Women and children were not allowed to go because of the illegal travel it entailed through Marseilles in rowboats. Every morning, when I took Alex to the camp school, I heard the news of the war on the radio.

I also learned of the yahrtzeit (memorial service) that would be held on Sunday for the Lithuanian Jews who perished in Dachau. A monument would be erected next to a mass grave. I promised to take Alex and he waited impatiently for Sunday.

We arrived to find many of Pina's friends who immediately recognized Alex because of his resemblance to his father. They asked Alex to recite the mourner's kaddish, which he did with no difficulty. Everyone there, having lost someone at Dachau, sobbed with overwhelming grief and sadness.

I then got the idea of erecting a tombstone in memory of Pina. Having no money for this I sent an application to Munich for reparation payments that the German government was making to anyone who had been in a concentration camp. In three months they notified me that I could order the tombstone and they would pay for it. I ordered one inscribed in Hebrew and it was placed in camp number one. I had a rabbi come to make a memorial prayer and Alex again chanted the kaddish in front of the people assembled. There were now two tombstones at the mass gravesite: Pina's and the one for Dr. Alkes, the oldest Jew in the Kovno ghetto.

It was our hope that we could one day exhume the bones for reburial in Jerusalem. Forty years later, this hope has remained unfulfilled.

My sister-in-law finally arrived in Landsburg having escaped Russia. We were once again a family but Hershel and his wife did not remain long. Making good on his wish to go to America they departed when their names came up for the quota for America.

Once again, Alex and I were alone, as Boris was fighting in Israel. In time, the war ended and Boris returned to Bavaria. Alex persisted in voicing his desire to go to Israel as soon as possible. All of our friends had already left and we were impatient to leave – especially Alex.

CHAPTER 12

One morning we were told that we were to leave right away for Italy. There, we were to board an Israeli ship that would take us directly to Israel. Overjoyed we packed immediately and were taken to Italy. We found the Israeli ship, the Atsmaost, waiting for us.

Seeing the ship with Israeli sailors and officers speaking in Hebrew was a wonderful experience. When the sailors greeted us with a warm “shalom” Alex surprised them with his fluency in Hebrew. They noticed how well we spoke Lithuanian surmising that we were from that land.

This seemed like a dream – for us to have our own ships, our own military, our own land. We sang Hebrew songs constantly and danced with the children. Everyone savored their precious freedom.

Passing through Crete we were beset by very rough seas and really worried that the ship would be swamped. This danger passed, however, and we were to sail the most serene sea possible the rest of the way. We rejoiced our good fortune by singing the Hebrew song, “We are going to Israel to help build our land.”

We spent four days on the ship and all one could see in any direction was clear, blue sky and deep, green water. Joy written all over his face Alex could barely wait to arrive in Haifa and he kept asking the sailors how far it was to port. On the fourth day in the distance we made out the snow-capped peaks of Mount Hermon. Along the shore we saw small dots, which turned out to be people waiting to greet the new arrivals. When he asked if anyone would meet us I told Alex that we would go by bus to Bnai Braq where a relative would come to visit us.

We disembarked and everybody was greeted with hugs and kisses – everyone but us. In Bnai Braq, the brother of a friend would put us up in his house, in exchange for equipment I brought from Germany for his butcher shop.

After one night in his house, and having everything taken from us, the man took us to another butcher’s home. There we had to pay five hundred dollars in advance to rent a small room with a small kitchen. It was painful to be cheated by a fellow Jew-orthodox.

At the time, each family was rationed to four hundred and fifty grams of meat per week. He would give us the bone and fat for our ration tickets and then sell the meat on the black market.

We also had our problems with the union-run school that Alex attended. When I found out that the teacher kicked Alex in his thin little legs I went to complain. I asked him if it was his mission to finish the work that Hitler had started. When he gave nervousness as an excuse I suggested that he could work out his nervousness by banging his own head against the wall. I took Alex out of that school immediately and put him into the Mizrachi school run by the very orthodox.

Boris found a job as a bricklayer at a construction site. When the foreman learned that Boris was in the Irgun, however, he fired him. Boris had a hard time finding work from then on even though he had fought in the war for Israel.

I became pregnant with my daughter Betty and was able to get extra rations. Alex was so thin, however, that I used the extra rations to feed him. Thanks to my sister-in-law in America I had diapers and everything else necessary for a baby just in time for Betty's birth.

Just at this time a polio epidemic had reached Israel. Terrified, I asked Boris to write his Canadian relatives to send us another set of papers to migrate. Meanwhile, Hershel sent us enough food parcels to feed both us and others in need – neighbors begged us for food. Luckily, Boris found a job in a bakery and there was sufficient bread in the house.

I had managed to find three of my parents' cousins so my children at least now had relatives. Yet life was very difficult in Israel. I found our small quarters and having to sleep on the sofa bed very annoying. The labor market called for physical labor, and I could not see Alex growing up do to that. I was unhappy in Israel and lonely for my brother.

Shortly, we received immigration papers for Canada. But now we had to wait until we could scrape together the money for the plane tickets and until we heard from the Canadian consulate. Finally, we flew to London and from there to Montreal and then Winnipeg.

We managed to have Alex's Bar Mitzvah before we left for Canada. Now, once again, we felt like eternal wanderers and I could not answer Alex's question, "After Canada, where will we then go?" My little Betty was not yet aware of anything but watched everything with her big dark eyes as she hung on to Alex.

It was difficult to leave Israel, especially for Alex, who had made many friends. But after the physical and mental ordeal of the concentration camp the difficult economic times in Israel had become too much to bear. I assured everyone at the Bar Mitzvah that Alex would return one day to Israel.

The next day we were taken to the airport at Lod. We boarded the plane with no more than twenty dollars per person, but we were expecting one hundred English pounds in London, sent by our Canadian cousins. Alex read a book about Canada written in Hebrew. He expressed concern about not knowing any English but I assured him that he would learn it fast.

Leaving London, we had an unexpected overnight stopover in Ireland because of plane trouble. From Ireland, we flew to Scotland and then on to Montreal. On the Montreal leg of the journey the plane's wings iced up and it kept losing altitude for almost half an hour. My husband and son slept through the whole difficulty while I sat awake. About three hours from Montreal we entered warmer air and the crisis ended. I awoke my two men to tell them what they had slept through.

Our cousin from Ottawa met us in Montreal and drove us to Ottawa. After a few happy days in his house, he took us to his sister's home in Toronto, where we spent a few more days. On Kol Nidre night, of all nights, we were put on a train for Winnipeg.

We traveled all night hoping that our cousins in Winnipeg would treat us humanely. At least we knew that Boris had a bakery job waiting for him, and that we would not have to beg anyone for anything. Betty enjoyed the ride having everyone on the train playing with her. Alex kept reading and asking questions about Canada. In one perceptive moment he told me that life would be easier in Canada.

We met a couple from Winnipeg in the dining car who knew our Winnipeg cousins. When they told us that our cousins were very fine and respected people we felt comforted. They commented on Alex's maturity and knowledge and said that Betty would grow up to be a beautiful woman. This couple has remained our friends over the years.

Spotting his waiting cousins from the train window Boris was elated. This was the first time he felt as if he had family since he was sent to Siberia at age nineteen. They embraced and kissed all of us.

Cousin Moishe drove us to Cousin Israel's house where many other relatives waited to greet us. We immediately felt a warmth and a closeness in this household. We were given a room and we deposited our few belongings and washed up for lunch. For once, Boris felt at peace – having fought in three armies, the Polish, Russian and Israeli.

After a short stay at Israel's house we rented an apartment and Boris went to work at a bakery. The cousins had paid the first month's rent for us and we used Boris' first paycheck to buy some food and dishes.

I enrolled Alex in the school, which was only one block from home. Again, he voiced his concern about not knowing English but I assured him that with some patience, he would catch on. I told the principal that Alex knew all the subjects but not in English. He assured me that Alex would do well. Day by day it became easier for Alex. Making friends quickly also helped him to learn to speak English.. After one month the principal told me that Alex had started to raise his hand in class.

I had high hopes for Alex. I wanted him to have a profession so that he would not have to work at physical jobs. He saw how hard his parents worked and he wanted to help.

EPILOGUE

The years passed quickly and the children grew up. After Alex graduated high school, he got a summer job with the Canadian Pacific Railroad, traveling coast to coast. Doing this for four summers he managed to finance his university education and he graduated as an electrical engineer. He secured a position with Manitoba Hydro even though the railroad offered him a job as an engineer.

On New Years Day he announced his engagement to Marcia and they married in June, 1962. I tried to discourage him from marrying so young since he had been robbed of his youth but he persisted with his plans. We found Marcia's family to be close and devoted.

Alex decided to start his own business with a partner. Alex asked his father to help him out and of course he did. After a slow start business began to improve.

One day, his barber told Alex that his partner had been in earlier and made this pronouncement: "It's too bad that Hitler didn't murder enough Jews, especially my partner." Alex bolted out of the chair, went up to his office, and told his partner that their partnership was terminated. Alex shortly opened his own office in another location. Before long he was appointed an aide to the Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba – the only Jew among forty such aides. My heart burst with pride.

Today, Alex is a developer with his own company. He and Marcia have been married twenty-three years and have one son who is studying at the University of Toronto.

That is how forty-four years have flown by – a terrible beginning, but a good ending, thank God.

I have dedicated this book to my son, with the hopes that, in his lifetime and in the lifetime of his wife and son, they may all live together as free people in a free world – where all nations may live in peace and no man may rise to say this horror never happened. There are still groups today who thrive on bigotry and anti-Semitism. There are still war criminals at large in the world. We must remain forever vigilant, to insure that this infection of the human spirit is never permitted to become an epidemic, under the guise of respectability.

